

THOMAS PYNCHON

V.

1998

© 1998 by Thomas Pynchon. All rights reserved.

Thomas Pynchon

V.

Chapter One

In which Benny Profane, a schlemiel and human yo-yo, gets

I

Christmas Eve, 1955, Benny Profane, wearing black levis,

"Every night is Christmas Eve on old East Main,

Sailors and their sweethearts all agree.

Neon signs of red and green

Shine upon the friendly scene,

Welcoming you in from off the sea.

Santa's bag is filled with all your dreams come true:

Nickel beers that sparkle like champagne,

Barmaids who all love to screw,

All of them reminding you

It's Christmas Eve on old East Main."

"Yay chief," yelled a seaman deuce. Profane rounded the c

Since his discharge from the Navy Profane had been road-l
into waiting presence, here were your underage Marine bar

Arriving at the Sailor's Grave, Profane found a small fig

"Why can't man live in peace
with his fellow man," wondered a voice behind Profane's l

The Scaffold-boat's crew were absent, this tin can having a sweet smile; even as the N.O.B. band is playing Auld Lang Syne.

Beatrice brought beer. There was a piercing yelp from one of the

"God," she said, "it's Ploy again." Ploy was now an engineer on canal work, gum abscesses. . . ."No," screamed Ploy. They

He would stand on the fantail and harangue whoever would listen.

"Man, I want to die, is all," cried Ploy.

"Don't you know," said Dahoud, "that life is the most precious possession you have?"

"Ho, ho," said Ploy through his tears. "Why?"

"Because," said Dahoud, "without it, you'd be dead."

"Oh," said Ploy. He thought about this for a week. He called it a parabolic and glittering, spraying the Sailor's Grave.

It became Ploy's favorite amusement. The word spread through the

"Who did he get," Profane said. "I wasn't looking."

"Beatrice," said Beatrice. Beatrice being another barmaid
Seventh Fleet, raising a gold boatswain's pipe to her lip

Ploy's head now appeared around a corner of the bar. He s

"Howdy," said Dewey Gland. "I would like to sing you a li

"To celebrate your becoming a PFC," said Ploy. "Dewey sin

"That was last year," said Profane.

But Dewey Gland propped one foot on the brass rail and th

Pore Forlorn Civilian,

We're
goin to miss you so.

In the goat hole and the wardroom they're cryin,

Even the mizzable X.O.

You're makin a mistake,

Though yore ass they should break,

Yore report chits number a million.

Ship me over for twenty years,

I'll never be a Pore Forlorn Civilian.

"It's pretty," said Profane into his beer glass.

"There's more," said Dewey Gland.

"Oh," said Profane.

A miasma of evil suddenly enveloped Profane from behind;

"Benny. How is the pimping business, hyeugh, hyeugh."

The laugh could only have come from Profane's onetime shi
intended, horribly obscene.

"Old Pig. Aren't you missing movement?"

"I am AWOL. Pappy Hod the boatswain mate drove me over th

"How is Pappy."

Pig told him how Pappy Hod and the barmaid he'd married had

That young wife, Paola. She'd said sixteen, but no way of

Profane had been there when they met: the Metro Bar, on S

"Chicago," from Pappy Hod in his gangster voice. "You heard the
girl it happened to be sitting across the table. American

Pappy ended up borrowing 500 for 700 from Mac the cook's

Maybe it had only been a way for her to get to America -

Pappy Hod had described her for the deck apes' amusement
wasn't written down in numbers. Which after forty-five ye

"Good stuff," said Pig aside. Profane looked toward the b

She smiled at Profane: sad, with an effort.

"You come back to re-enlist?"

"Just passing," Profane said.

"You come with me to the west coast," Pig said. "Ain't an

"Look, look," cried little Ploy, hopping up and down on c

"Boys," Mrs. Buffo announced, "it's Christmas
Eve." She produced the boatswain's pipe and began to play

They had reached the part that goes "Peace on the earth,

"Suck Hour!" screamed Ploy.

Which kind of broke the spell. The quick-thinking inmates
milling around of jolly jack tars, hoisted Ploy bodily, a

Mrs. Buffo, poised on her rampart like the trumpeter of C
detachment in their charge had formed a flying wedge. In

Profane sat at the end of the bar, watching hand-tooled s

Soon he looked over; Paola was there, arms around his leg

"It's awful," she said.

"Oh," said Profane. He patted her head.

"Peace," she sighed. "Isn't that what we all want, Benny?"

"Hush," said Profane, "look: someone has just walloped De

Paola murmured against his leg. They sat quiet, without mind
the carnage going on above them. Mrs. Buffo had undertaken

Pig had moved aside two dozen beer glasses and seated him

Outside came sirens, whistles, running feet. "Oh, oh," sa

"Back way," said Profane.

"Bring the broad," said Pig.

The three of them ran broken-field through a roomful of t
Gland. By the time the Shore Patrol had crashed into the

II

Where they ended up finally was an apartment in Newport M

An unfortunate habit of Teflon's drew Profane and Paola t
bed, taking pictures. These he sold to avid sailors at th

It happened that Paola Hod, nee Maijstral, cast loose at

"You're all I have," she warned him. "Be good to me." The
proved also to be a problem, and resulted in a growing, m

Part of the trouble was that Pig and Dewey both had eyes

"She's trying to recover from men," Profane tried to say.

Truth of it was Profane wasn't getting any. Though it bec

"What do you mean," Profane said. "Be good to you."

"What Pappy Hod wasn't," she said. He soon gave up trying

She taught them all a song. Learned
from a para on French leave from the fighting in Algeria:

Demain le noir matin,

Je fermerai la porte

Au nez des années mortes;

J'irai par les chemins.

Je mendierai ma vie

Sur la terre et sur l'onde,

Du vieux au nouveau monde . . .

He had been short and built like the island of Malta itse

Tomorrow, the black morning, I close the door in the face

She taught Dewey Gland the chord changes and so they all
from the F.L.N. the night before. She wore a Miraculous M

The night before New Year's Eve they wandered away from t

"No," she said.

"Meaning yes."

Groan,
went the bed. Before either of them knew it:

"Click," went Teflon's Leica.

Profane did what was expected of him: came roaring off the

Outraged privacy was not so important; but the interruption

"You don't mind," Teflon was telling him. Paola was hurrying

"Out in the snow," Profane said, "is where that camera, Teflon

"Here:" opened the camera, handed Profane the film, "you'll

Profane took the film but couldn't back down. So he dressed

"Out," Profane cried, "in the snow." Which in fact there was
silent against the big windows. There was nothing else to

"Did you want to stay," he asked.

"No, no," she shivered, a discreet foot of worn bench between

Madonna, he thought, I have a dependent now.

"What are you shivering for. It's warm enough in here."

She shook her head no (whatever that meant), staring at the

Snow falling lazy on the water made 11 P.M. look like a t
than the turbulence of the screws or the snow-hiss on the

Some of us are afraid of dying; others of human loneliness

But the door behind him opened again. Soon he felt Paola's

They rode the bus into town, wordless; alit near the Mont

They found Pig next door in Chester's
Hillbilly Haven. Dewey was sitting in with the band. "Par

Some dozen ex-Scaffold sailors wanted a reunion. Pig, app

"Back to Newport News?" (Deciding not to tell Pig about t

"This has got to cease," he said but nobody was listening

III

Profane slept that night at Pig's place down by the old f

Around three Profane woke up on the kitchen floor with a croaked. "Where you keep the aspirin." No answer. Profane

Rachel Owlglass had owned, back in '54, this MG. Her Dad's gift. After giving it its shakedown cruise in the region

Profane was just out of the Navy and working that summer piece by piece, which was how the Haganah would do it. Afraid with love. He wondered how American Jews could sit vaingl

Profane had wondered then what it was with Da Conho and then he found out not long after this that the same thing was

He met her through the MG, like everyone else met her. It

He and Rachel, both covered with lettuce leaves, looked a man of my dreams. Take that lettuce leaf off your face so

"No," she said, "you're not him."

"Maybe," said Profane, "we can try it next time with a fi

"Ha, ha," she said and roared off. He found a rake and st

Five minutes out on Route
17 he decided if he ever made it back to the Trocadero un

He was too afraid for his life to be, as he normally was,

anyway? Because Rachel had a nice ass? He glanced sideways

It was an uncomfortable afternoon. Sun beat down out of a

She talked about Bennington, her alma mater. She talked a

Rachel came from the Five Towns on the south shore of Long
comprising Malverne, Lawrence, Cedarhurst, Hewlett and Wood

Only the brave escape. Come Sunday nights, with golfing c
night's party, off to visit with relatives in Lawrence, a

Rachel wanted. Profane, having repaired roads around the

By the time the sun was going down they'd nearly finished
off behind a tree and pointed west, with some intention o

It went down; as if he'd extinguished it after all and co

Rachel was watching him, curious. He zipped up and stagge

Two more folded cans fell to the bottom of the quarry, th

She hadn't moved from the car.

"Benny," one fingernail touched his face.

"Wha."

"Will you be my friend?"

"You look like you have enough,"

She looked down the quarry. "Why don't we make believe none of the other is real," she said: "no Benning

"Why."

"Isn't that the world?"

"They teach you that in freshman geology or something?"

She looked hurt. "It's just something I know."

"Benny," she cried - a little cry - "be my friend, is all

He shrugged.

"Write."

"Now don't expect -"

"How the road is. Your boy's road that I'll never see, wi

He scratched his stomach. "Sure."

Profane kept running into her in what was left of the sun
the right-hand steering wheel and talking, talking, nothi

Soon enough what he was afraid would happen happened - he
middle.

He never got beyond or behind the chatter about her worl

He never found his beloved machine gun. Lorn and drained-
workers abroad, some love back in the States.

After teardown Profane set out to find Rachel. She was ou

Profane wandered up by Rachel's cabin again. He heard spl
around to investigate. There she was washing her car. In

"You beautiful stud," he heard her say, "I love to touch
- and oh so Ivy that I couldn't ever leave you, dear." It
the doors of tomorrow's victims in blood. The purpose of

After the summer, then, there'd been letters, his surly a

"What is it then, hey," he'd asked once.

"A secret," with her small child's smile, which like Rodg
and gelatinous.

She visited him occasionally, as now, at night, like a su

IV

As it turned out, the New Year's party was to end all yo-

Paola stuck close at first to Profane, who had eyes for a

Depuis que je suis ne

J'ai vu mourir des pères,

J'ai vu partir des frères,

Et des enfants
pleurer . . .

The para again. Who haunted this week. Since I was born

"What was that airborne boy's problem," Profane asked her

"That's it," Paola said. "Je suis né. Being born. That's

Dewey's voice sounded like part of the inanimate wind, so

At one minute into 1956 Dewey was down on deck and Profane

"Oh, man," Profane said to the night. "I like
to see young people get together." He scanned the main deck

"All right you men," 50 watts of disembodied voice began
SP's were coming across rat-fashion on the mooring lines.

Profane watched it all and half-worried about Paola. He

"If I was God . . ." He pointed at an SP; "Zap, SP, your

The motor pool on the pier was augmented by a cattle car,

"Zap,"

said Profane, "cattle car, keep going and drive off end of

"Well, almost," he said, to the gone bird, to the snow. He

Noise below diminished. Bodies were carried off, stacked on the truck, after several bursts of feedback noise, was switched off.

Profane woke up early in the morning, covered with a thin layer of sweat.

Again, he was in the guts of something inanimate. Noise above him.

"Ha-ha," said Profane. He sneaked around a corner, found a can of SNAP. Footsteps went pattering back down the ladder.

Four mousetraps later, Profane found himself in the galley.

"Hey," yelled the watchman, two decks above.

"Oh, oh," said Profane. He sneaky-Peted out of the galley.

"My coffee," Profane muttered, taking the steps down two decks. Profane was off. He made it up three decks before he heard the alarm.

"What now?" He wandered into a passageway lined with empty lockers.

Outside the galley again he started throwing them in all directions.

So he was. Profane absently hefted his one remaining mousetrap.

What do I do,

he wondered, scream? No. The night watchman was laughing

Paola was at the ferry, waiting. She took his arm as they

"You have snow on you." She reached up to brush it off and

Rachel caught up with him in the bus station in Norfolk.
to sleep. He had just begun to drift off when the paging

He knew immediately, even before he was fully awake, who

"Dear Benny," Rachel said, "I've called every bus station

"You know -" he tried to say.

"I'll send you bus fare."

She would.

A hollow, twanging sound dragged across the floor toward
is my friend Dewey Gland," he said, almost whispering. "F

Dewey sang her the old Depression song, Wanderin' Eels in

Rachel's hair was red, veined with premature gray, so long

He felt that invisible, umbilical string tug at his midse

And it looks like I'm never going to cease.

"She wants you," Dewey said. The girl at the Information

"I want you," Rachel said. He moved his chin
across the mouthpiece, making grating sounds with a three

He wanted to say, God, the things we want. He said: "How

"It's over at Raoul's," she said. Raoul, Slab, and Melvin

"Benny." She had never cried, never that he could remembe
avoid saying good-bye. He hung up.

"There's a nice fight on," Dewey Gland said, sullen and r

If you look from the side at a planet swinging around in

Profane and Paola left for New York that night. Dewey Gla
bus, who babbled, cooed, vomited, practiced self-asphyxia

About the time they hit Maryland, Profane decided to get

She nodded. "Are you in love, then."

"She's a good woman. She'll put you on to a job, find you

"What are you afraid of."

"Go to sleep." She did, on Profane's shoulder.

At the 34th Street station, in New York, he gave her a br

"Shall I tell her . . ."

"She'll know. That's the trouble. There's nothing you - I
- can tell her she doesn't know."

"Call me, Ben. Please. Maybe."

"Right," he told her. "Maybe."

V

So in January 1956 Benny Profane showed up again in New Y

If anybody had been around to remember him they would have
a transit, crane, payloader, couldn't lay bricks, stretch

One morning Profane woke up early, couldn't get back sleep
getting his fly zipped and other fifteen repairing a shoe

Profane took a Lexington Avenue local up to Grand Central

The shuttle after morning rush hour is near empty, like a
all gone home. In the hours between nine and noon the per

On his eleventh or twelfth transit Profane fell asleep and

Profane blinked awake and watched them, jazzing around, c
swung from the handle-grips, shimmied up the poles; Tolito

They passed the can as the train was pulling into Times S

Kook, the baby, could hold nothing in. "Maricon!" he yell
to the next car. Tolito put his hand on Kook's head, tryi

"Hey, man," Kook said. Profane watched him, half-cautious

"How come," Jose said. He put the coffee can absently on

"He was asleep," Tolito said.

"He's a yo-yo," Jose said. "Wait and see." They forgot Pr

"See," Jose said.

"Hey man," Kook said, "how come."

"You out of a job," Tolito said.

"Why don't you hunt alligators, like my brother," Kook sa

"Kook's brother shoots them with a shotgun,"
Tolito slid.

"If you need a job, you should hunt alligators," Jose sai

Profane scratched his stomach. He looked at the floor.

"Is it steady," he said.

The subway pulled in to Times Square, disgorged passenger

Among the crowd that squeezed inside this time was a youn

"He wants to help Angel kill the alligators," Kook told
her. Profane was asleep, lying diagonal on the seat.

In this dream, he was all alone, as usual. Walking on a s

Somehow it was all tied up with a story he'd heard once,
all over with colored balloons. On the fourth limb from t

To Profane, alone in the street, it would always seem may

Was it home, the mercury-lit street? Was he returning lik
soon become ivory, in whose bulk slept, latent, exquisite

This was all there was to dream; all there ever was: the

Her face was young, soft. She had a brown mole on one che

"Wha, lady," he said, "wha."

"Do you like it here," she cried.

"I do not like it, lady, no," said Profane. The train was
shopping at Bloomingdale's stood glaring hostile at them
the kids got in; as Profane started through the doors clo

They lived uptown in the 80's, between Amsterdam Avenue a

Next day Kook found him sleeping there and turned on the

"Man, you go find a job," Kook said. "Fina says so." Profane jumped up and went chasing Kook through the little apartm

A few hours later, they all came reeling down the steps of the three of them went flying. They lay on the frozen gra

"Man," Angel said, "there is one." She came walking a lea

Angel sighed. "There are so many," he said. "So many mill

"Out in Jersey too," said Profane. "I worked in Jersey."

"A lot of good stuff in Jersey," Angel said.

"Out
on the road," said Profane. "They were all in cars."

"Geronimo and I work in the sewers," Angel said. "Under t

"Under the street," Profane repeated after a minute: "unc

Geronimo stopped singing and told Profane how it was. Dic

Since the sewer scandal last year, the Department had got conscientious. They called for volunteers to go o

Profane, all at once was sober. "Are they still looking f

"Sure," Geronimo said. "You ever use a shotgun before?"

Profane said yes. He never had, and never would, not at s

"I will talk to Mr. Zeitsuss, the boss," said Geronimo.

The beanbag hung for a second jolly and bright in the air

Chapter Two

The Whole Sick Crew

I

Profane,

Angel and Geronimo gave up girl-watching about noon and l

There is no way to describe the way she walked except as

Rachel worked as an interviewer or personnel girl at a doctor's office; high; had two assistants, one a secretary/receptionist/nurse.

She had arrived at ten in the morning. Irving told her that marriageable were it not for an ugly nose could now go home.

It disgusted Rachel, her theory being that it was not for nothing.

She sat back, watching the patients come through the outer door.

Directly across the room from Rachel was a mirror, hung high above a maze of works, enclosed in clear Swedish lead glass. The

Rachel was looking into the mirror at an angle of 45 degrees, turned toward the room and the face on the other side, reflected.

"Miss Owlglass." Irving, smiling from the entrance to Schaeffer's, gassed the mirror and caught a sidelong glance at her own reflection.

"Count them," she said. "This is the balance."

"Later," the doctor said. "Sit down, Miss Owlglass."

"Esther is flat broke," Rachel said, "and she is going to the

"- is a vicious racket," he said dryly. "Cigarette."

"I have my own." She sat on the edge of the chair, pushed

"Trafficking in human vanity," Schoenmaker continued, "pr
it can be bought. Yes -" his arm shot out with a heavy si

"You are unnecessary," she said, through a halo of smoke.

"You encourage them to sell out," she said.

He watched the sensual arch of her own nose. "You're Orth

She looked "hypocrite" at him.

"No," he said, "Eve was the first Jewish mother, the one
have a piece fruit.'" "

"Ha, ha," said Rachel.

"What about this chain, what of inherited characteristics
and small forces like me will never prevail against it. A

Behind the far door came the thud of Trench's knife pract

"Inside," she said, "what does it do to them there. You a

"You are a nasty girl," said Schoenmaker, "and so pretty, make people act less nasty. Till then, how do I know what

"You set up another chain." She was trying not to yell. "

"Inside, outside," he said, "you're being inconsistent, y

"I'd like to," she said, rising. "I have bad dreams about

"Have your analyst tell you what they mean," he said.

"I hope you keep dreaming." She was at the door, half-tur

"My bank balance is big enough so I don't get disillusion

Being the kind of girl who can't resist an exit line: "I the same wind that moved the pine tree, leaving behind th

Now, having left the grating behind, she walked over the

"What do you let her take for," he had said, "always take." It was in his studio, she rem

"Baby," she said, "Slab, it is only that the kid is broke

"No," Slab said, a tic dancing high on his cheekbone - or has she ever paid you back."

"She will," Rachel said.

"Sure. Now, \$800 more. To change this." He waved his arm

"Look at it, the nose," he said. "Why does she want to ge

"Is it only an artist's concern," Rachel said. "You objec

"Rachel," he yelled, "she takes home 50 a week, 25 comes earrings, clothes. Food, occasionally. So now, 800 for a

"She has been right on time," Rachel said, frosty, "in ca

"Baby," suddenly ail wistful and boyish, "you are a good

The argument had gone back and forth with neither of them

She turned out of the park and walked away from the Hudson bottom of the lowest sewer bed right up through the street

She entered her lobby, smiled at the ancient doorman; int

In the shower Rachel sang a torch song, in a red-hot-mama

Say a man
is no good

For anything but jazzing around.

He'll go live in a cathouse,

He'll jazz it all over town.

And all kinds of meanness

To put a good woman down.

Now I am a good woman

Because I'm telling you I am

And I sure been put down

But honey, I don't give a damn.

You going to have a hard time

Finding you a kind hearted man.

Because a kind hearted man

Is the kind who will . . .

Presently the light in Paola's room began to leak out the

When she left, turning off all the lights, the hands on a
the surface of a mirror, and had now to repeat in mirror-

II

The party, as if it were inanimate after all, unwound lik

You felt she'd done a thousand secret things to her eyes.

Young

Stencil the world adventurer, seated on the sink, waggled

She didn't like him, Stencil had decided.

"It's the way he looks at Paola," she'd told Esther. Esth

But it wasn't sexual, it lay deeper. Paola was Maltese.

Born in 1901, the year Victoria died, Stencil was in time investigating the June Disturbances in Malta.

On an evening in 1946, separated by stone balusters from

MARG: Then you must leave?

STEN: Stencil must be in Lucerne before the week is out.

MARG: I dislike premilitary activity.

STEN: It isn't espionage.

MARG: What then?

(Stencil laughs, watching the twilight.)

MARG: You are so close.

STEN: To whom? Margravine, not even to himself. This place none conceivable unless, ha ha, the network of white hall

(There is a long pause, as the light reaching them through

STEN: Stencil reached his majority three years after old official report."

MARG: A woman.

STEN: Another woman.

MARG: It is she you are pursuing? Seeking?

STEN: You'll ask next if he believes her to be his mother

Since 1945, Herbert Stencil had been on a conscious campaign or two had also been leveled.

In that interregnum between kingdoms-of-death Herbert just

In 1939 he was in London, working for the Foreign Office. to return to the States just yet, he was leaving through

"V. for victory," the Margravine had suggested playfully.

"No." Stencil shook his head. "It may be that Stencil has

Whatever the reason, he began to discover that sleep was

Finding her: what then? Only that what love there was to could hardly release it, it was too dear. To sustain it h

Here in New York the impasse had become acute. He'd come

Stencil would wait. He'd taken over a low-rent apartment coming more and more to comprise sons and friends of the

Until such time there were Schoenmaker to wait for; and C

The owner of this apartment seemed to express a prevailing to Stencil a horrifying spectacle.

Fergus Mixolydian the Irish Armenian Jew and universal ma

His other amusement was watching the TV. He'd devised an placed on the inner skin of his forearm. When Fergus drop

The rest of the Crew partook of the same lethargy. Raoul

Perhaps
the only reason they survived, Stencil reasoned, was that

The party itself, tonight, was divided in three parts. Fe a kind of love feast or daisy chain; wine would spill, fu

Stencil shrugged irritably, rose from the sink and found

"Man," said Raoul.

"Scene," said Slab, waving his arm to indicate the unwind

"Later," Stencil said and moved on out the door.

The girls stood silent. They were camp followers of a sor

"Oh yes," said Melvin.

"Uptown," Slab said, "is taking over the world."

"Ha, ha," said one of the girls.

"Shut up," said Slab. He tugged at his hat. He always wore
non-button-down collars. Padded, pointed shoulders: he wa

"Excuse me," she murmured, drifting away toward the fire

He blushed and was cute. "Brad," he said. "I'm sorry I ma

She knew instinctively: he will be fine as the fraternity
just out of an Ivy League school, who knows he will never

"How long have you been in New York?"

Outside the V-Note a number of bums stood around the front of the bar, out of breath. From time to time a collegiate-looking type, usually in a suit, would

Inside McClintic Sphere was swinging his ass off. His skin was

He blew a hand-carved ivory alto saxophone with a 4-1/2 inch bore. He was either with a night off or taking a long break from some other job.

At the end of the bar in the V-Note is a table which is reserved for the

The group on the stand had no piano: it was bass, drums, and saxophone. The bass was small and evil-looking and his eyes were yellow.

Horn and alto together favored sixths and minor fourths and

Since the soul of Charlie Parker had dissolved away into the ether, the scene and when he left it some curious negative will - a

"He plays all the notes Bird missed," somebody whispered.

It was near closing time, the last set.

"It's nearly time to go," Charisma said. "Where is Paola?"

"Here she comes," said Winsome.

Outside the wind had its own permanent gig. And was still

Chapter Three

In which Stencil, a quick-change artist, does eight imper

As spread
thighs are to the libertine, flights of migratory birds t

But soon enough he'd wake up the second, real time, to ma

His protest to the Margravine di Chiave Lowenstein (suspe
where he'd spent a week night-walking the alcazar asking

Herbert Stencil, like small children at a certain stage a
was what he called the general technique, which is not ex

Around each seed of a dossier, therefore, had developed a
where Herbert had never been and knew nothing at all about

One evening, drowsing on the sofa in Bongo-Shaftsbury's a

Young Stencil hadn't written because he was eighteen and

A certain Porpentine, one of his father's colleagues, had
Eric Bongo-Shaftsbury, the father of the man who owned the

I

As the afternoon progressed, yellow clouds began to gather

For one P. Aieul, café waiter and amateur libertine, the
out on the square. Though he'd been there over coffee not

Aieul lounged near the entrance to the café; outwardly in

He watched the sun darken and wind flutter the leaves of
Porpentine, Porpentine. It whined in the square's hollow

Rain began, thin drops, hardly more than a mist. "Hat fir

Merde, Aieul thought. At the table: "M'sieu?"

"Ah," the gross smiled, "coffee then. Café, you know."

On his return the two were conversing lackadaisical about
could distinguish were names. Victoria Wren. Sir Alastair

This fat one was out to seduce the girl, Victoria Wren, a
and Tweed would enter their consulate tonight arm-in-arm,

Rain had increased in thickness. A white envelope with a

A fit? But there was no sun. And Tweed had begun to sing:

Pazzo son!

Guardate, come io piango ed imploro . . .

Italian opera. Aieul felt sick. He watched them with a pa

Come io chiedo pieta!

Rain drenched the two. The sunburned face bobbed like a b
the other, who now stood watching him. The square was emp

(How many times had they stood this way: dwarfed horizont

They turned about formally and parted in opposite directions.

Bonne chance, Aieul thought. Whatever it is tonight, bonn
I will see neither of you again, that's the least I can w

Low places in the square filled, the usual random sets of

II

Yusef the factotum, temporarily on loan from Hotel Khediv

"Late!" shouted Meknes, leader of the kitchen force. "And

Not a bad assignment, Yusef thought as he put on the white

Soon, from
his vantage, Yusef could allow the first sneer of many th

Anarchist and no one's fool. He kept abreast of current e
well.

Bung ho, the English said. Up goes the balloon. Yusef, be

But from the corner of his eye now: miracle. How, if one

A balloon-girl. A balloon-girl. Hardly seeming to touch t

"Oh," she smiled: "Oh thank you. Leltak leben." May thy r
milk.

As thy belly . . . enough. She bobbed off, light as cigar

Victoria. Named after her queen. He fought in vain to hol

His attention was to stray to her now and again throughou

Meknes dropped by every half-hour to call him names. If c
proceeding backward through the other's ancestry, creatin

Count Khevenhuller-Metsch the Austrian Consul had been sp

Yusef shook the punch ladle at the retreating back of Mek

But that will change, he smiled, grim. Soon he was day-dr

At the bottom of the steps sat the girl, Victoria, center
apices of a flat isosceles triangle were the gray-headed

To Yusef he held up five fingers: "Khamseh." As Yusef bus

Another street-fighter. How long since he'd seen reflexes

But this one was forty or forty-five. No one, Yusef reason

The Englishman's hands had relaxed. He nodded pleasantly.

"Lovely girl," the other said. He wore blue-tinted specta

The Englishman smiled, turned, picked up his five cups of

"Saw a fellow do that in a music hall once," he rumbled.
Really."

Porpentine extracted a cigarette and lay while smoking wh

Up on the mezzanine the man with the blue eyeglasses peek

A strange collection. There is more here, Yusef guessed.

III

The Fink restaurant was quiet: not much doing. A few Engl

Maxwell Rowley-Bugge, hair coiffed, mustaches curled and pains of panic begin to dance about his abdomen. For bene

Give it a quarter of an hour more, he decided. If nothing

He had crossed the border into Baedeker land some eight y
- any older and romance, religion, remorse entered, blund

But this one had told her friends, who became jealous - o

She'd wanted it. Even afterward, dry-eyed among a protect

How he had come to Alexandria, where he would go on leavi
a feature of the topography as the other automata: waiter

A common game among tourists. They knew what he was; and

Fink's now began a burst into life. Max looked up with in
waiting for the imperceptible nod, the high-sign.

He decided at last on a group of four: two men, a small g

He also had an eye, and something about the group disturk

His opening line was unimportant, being only a choice amo
seemed to want to play the gay dog. Fine, let them. Max k

An ideal touch: all behaved as if they'd known him for years. They had to be sent away: every chair in the Fink would be in use.

She'd been talking, the older girl - Victoria - white Vos.

Was there a bit of Alice there? Alice was of course another of girl-at-play, girl-in-heat. Blithe and so green . . .

She was Catholic; had been to a convent school near her home. She played with and within constantly: developing, exploring, making.

Now Alice - it had been "her" clergyman, had it not? she

Normally in gatherings like this Max could be talkative, but

He could go back into the business. There were touring companies, eight years aged, eyebrow-line altered, hair dyed, the music

But now Max found not much to say. The girl dominated conversation. Max could not cheer up. They were somehow depressing: Max

"My God," from Goodfellow. They looked up to see, material

"It's Hugh!" she cried, delighted.

"Indeed," came a hollow voice from inside somewhere.

"Hugh Bongo-Shaftsbury," said Goodfellow, ungracious.

"Harmakhis." Bongo-Shaftsbury indicated the ceramic hawk.

"Oh," Victoria said (that languid "oh"), "the Sphinx."

"How far down the Nile do you intend to go," asked Porper.

"I feel it is fresh territory, sir," Bongo-Shaftsbury replied.

Now what was this, Max wondered. An Egyptologist was he,

On the face of it, all normal. Rivalry for the young lady.

He came
to the awareness reluctantly. In Baedeker land one doesn't

But they were only posing as tourists. Playing a game different

Talk at the table stopped. The faces of the three men lost

"Hullo Lepsius," said Goodfellow. "Tired of the climate in

"Sudden business called me to Egypt."

So the party had already grown from four to seven. Max re

Was that how the sides were drawn up? Were there sides at

Goodfellow sniffed at his wine. "Your traveling companion
he said at last. "We'd rather hoped to see him again."

"Gone to a Switzerland," said Lepsius, "of clean winds, o

"Unless you go far enough south. I imagine far enough dow

Good timing, Max noted. And the gestures preceded the lin

Lepsius speculated: "Doesn't the law of the wild beast pr

"Perhaps. But in Europe, you know, we are civilized. Fort

Odd: neither Porpentine nor Bongo-Shaftsbury spoke. Each

"Shall we meet again in Cairo then," said Lepsius.

"Most certainly"; nodding.

Lepsius

took his leave then.

"What a queer gentleman," Victoria smiled, restraining Mi

Bongo-Shaftsbury turned to Porpentine. "Is it queer to fa

"It may depend on one's employment," was Porpentine's re

Time had come for the Fink to close up. Bongo-Shaftsbury

Porpentine turned to watch it. "Someone is in a hurry," B

"Indeed," said Goodfellow. The three watched a few lights
consulate. "Quiet, though."

Bongo-Shaftsbury laughed quickly, perhaps a bit incredulo

"Here. In the street . . ."

"A fiver would see me through," Max had continued, trying

"Oh," vague, "of course, I could spare it." Fumbling naiv

Victoria watched them from the curb opposite. "Do come al

Goodfellow grinned. "Here, m'dear." And started across wi

She stamped her foot. "Mr. Porpentine." Porpentine, five

The white wine, a ghost of Alice, first doubts that Porpe
Limping toward the next pool of light he sensed Porpentin

IV

The Alexandria and Cairo morning express was late. It put

Of course the train was late. Waldetar the conductor snor

Waldetar
was not an Alexandrian. Born in Portugal, he now lived wi

But Alexandria was a special case. In the Jewish year 355
But turned (goes the tale) on the guards and spectators i

Waldetar, a highly religious man, had heard the story fro

The storm and the earthquake have no mind. Soul cannot co

But elephants have souls. Anything that can get drunk, he
some soul. Perhaps this is all "soul" means. Events betwe

Merely train's hardware for any casual onlooker, Waldetar

Passengers and baggage aboard, the train overcame its inertia and describes a rough arc whose chord points southeast. But the

At Sidi Gaber the train swung at last toward the southeast and cut through an isthmus of desert during the siege of Alexandria.

Did the narwhal pull their plows? Devilfish drive their w

Down the embankment a group of Arabs lazed about, evaporating

Under the same sun Nita would be moving now about their l

"Though I'm not against it," he'd once told her during their first marriage, "I've had several wives."

"Great king," she yelled: "who?" They both started to laugh.

Nita, Nita . . . The mind's picture was always of her seated at the table with them - the squid hung to dry, nets stretched across and

Halfway to Damanhur he heard a child crying from a compartment

"But have you never played with a clockwork doll?" the man asked, pointing to the mechanism of the machinery inside. Walks, sings, jumps rope. Real life

"Bongo-Shaftsbury," the other began. Bongo-Shaftsbury waved

"Come. May I show you a mechanical doll. An electro-mecha

"Have you one" - she was frightened, Waldetar thought wit

"I am one," Bongo-Shaftsbury smiled. And pushed back the

"You see, Mildred. These wires run into
my brain. When the switch is thrown the other -"

"Papa!" the girl cried.

"Everything works by electricity. Simple and clean."

"Stop it," said the other Englishman.

"Why, Porpentine." Vicious. "Why. For her? Touched by her

Porpentine seemed to retreat bashfully. "One doesn't frig

"Hurrah. General principles again." Corpse fingers jabbed

"What is humanity."

"You ask the obvious, ha, ha. Humanity is something to de

There was noise from the rear car, behind Waldetar. Porpentine moved her rock, to the adjoining compartment.

The door to the rear platform was open: in front of it a

"Now," Porpentine pondered. The fat Englishman had taken

"What is the trouble," Waldetar demanded, in his best pub

"Nothing." Porpentine held out a sovereign. "Nothing that

Waldetar shrugged. Between them they got the Arab to a th
He tried to talk several times. He looked sick enough.

When the Englishmen had at last returned to their compart
part of your world until you are left with hardly more th

If they are what I think; what sort of world is it when t

Thinking, of course, of Manoel, Antonia and Maria: his ow

The desert creeps in on a man's land. Not a fellah, but h

No. The desert moves in. It happens, nothing else. No dji

Soon, nothing. Soon only the desert. The two goats must c
never to taste their soured milk again. The melons die be

They find him in the morning a mile from the house, skin

And now the house begins to fill with desert, like the lo

What does a man do? Gebrail shot a quick look back at his
to. His family lives all together in a room no bigger tha

Five years Gebrail had hated them. Hated the stone buildi

The

Lord's angel, Gebrail, dictated the Koran to Mohammed the

"Fine." The fare leaned over his shoulder, smelling of ga

Since noon they'd been all over the fashionable part of t
Rossetti: Coptic, probably. Eyes made impossibly huge wit

Of course she'd been a fare. He remembered the face. She

One merchant in the Muski too he had seen. A jewel merchant's shop; though he'd remained inside for nearly an hour. Gebra

Mohammed Ahmed, the Mahdi of '83, was believed by some to

But the desert's angel had hidden all the trumpets beneath

Gebrail lounged exhausted against the seat of his pinto-co

Tonight, he would get drunk with an acquaintance who sold
it, in fact, close at hand.

"Rumors," he said darkly, smiling at the girl with the ro

"Politics is a lie."

"Far up the Bahr-el-Abyad, in the heathen jungle, is a pl

"And Asrafil will sound the call to arms," snorted Gebrai

"Is the desert, is the desert. Wahyat abuk! God forbid."

And the fig-hawker went off into the smoke to get more br

Nothing was coming. Nothing was already here.

Back came the Englishman, with his gangrenous face. A fat

"Bide time," the fare called mirthfully.

"Ha, ho. I'm taking Victoria to
the opera tomorrow night."

Back in the cab: "There is a chemist's shop near the Creed

Night was coming rapidly. This haze would make the stars

VI

Three in the morning, hardly a sound in the streets, and

Breeze in the acacias: that was all. Girgis huddled in bu
or orange blossom, meat puddings. His customers were the

Take from them by day, take from them by night. If only h
- a response from the children; buffoon's treasure.

Enough, enough. Best get this over, he decided, and to be

And was halfway erect before he saw his competition. Another

Patience, then. Study his technique. We can always learn.

Skin? Girgis shivered again. He had a way of repressing t

Apparently the ledge narrowed toward the corner. The thief
was hugging the wall closer. He reached the corner. As he

Girgis was all sympathy. He could see it happening to him

The Englishman put out his cigarette, rose and began to c
to himself as he ascended, crawled out on a limb, straddl

After a lag of fifteen seconds, Girgis distinctly heard t

This is ridiculous, Girgis thought.

Crash. The Englishman fell into the bushes again. Girgis

"Bongo-Shaftsbury?" the Englishman said, hearing Girgis a
promenade a continent long." He began to sing.

It isn't the girl I saw you wiv in Brighton,

Who, who, who's your lady friend?

Mad, thought Girgis, pitying. The sun hadn't stopped with

"She will be in 'love' with him, whatever the word means.

"But perhaps the sun, and what is happening down the Nile

What

comfort could Girgis give him? His English wasn't good, h

I'm getting old, Girgis thought. I have seen my own ghost

VII

The bierhalle north of the Ezbekiyeh Garden had been crea

Hanne had held on to the job only because she was stout a
enough! The whims of Boeblich the owner got only amusemen

To the bovine of this world - this tourist world, at leas

How upset Boeblich would be could he see her lover. Hanne
and serious drinking, up to her elbows in soapy water. Le

"There is a competitor in town," he confided to her, "pus

Well if he came in . . . anything she happened to overhear

For his poor weak eyes, his loud snoring, his boylike way

All day, through the slower morning hours, her hearing se
orders, a dropped plate which shattered like her tender e

Imagination, she told herself. She'd always been a practi

Damn men and
their politics. Perhaps it was a kind of sex for them. Di

She pushed back a straggle of yellow hair with one soap-k

She rinsed and stacked
the last plate. No. A stain. Back went the plate into the

Was the stain real? She didn't like its color. The color
That's all it is. She scrubbed fiercely. Outside, the bee

O God, would it never go away? She gave it up at last and

A quick look at her hair in the mirror-fragment over the

Of course the first face she saw was that of the "competi

". . . Lord Cromer could keep it from avalanching . . ."

". . . Sir, every whore and assassin in Cairo . . ."

In the corner someone vomited. Hanne rushed to clean it u

". . . if they should assassinate Cromer . . ."

". . . bad show, to have
no Consul-General . . ."

". . . it will degenerate . . ."

Amorous embrace from a customer. Boeblich approached with

". . . keep him safe at all costs . . ."

". . . capable men in this sick world are at a . . ."

". . . Bongo-Shaftsbury will try . . ."

". . . the Opera . . ."

". . . where? Not the Opera . . ."

". . . Ezbekiyeh Garden . . ."

". . . the Opera . . . Manon Lescaut . . ."

". . . who did say? I know her . . . Zenobia the Copt . . ."

". . . Kenneth Slime at the Embassy's girl . . ."

Love. She paid attention.

". . . has it from Slime that Cromer is taking no precautions . . ."

". . . no precautions . . . O God . . ."

". . .
. God, with a shamrock . . . Goodfellow wanted to lob a bomb . . ."

". . . as if nothing could wake him up . . . doesn't he remember . . ."

A long wait by the bar while Wernher and Musa tapped a new rhythm . . ."

". . . now that they have met . . ."

". . . they will stay, I imagine, round . . ."

". . . the jungles round . . ."

". . . will there be, do you think . . ."

". . . if it begins it will be round . . ."

Where?

"Fashoda."

"Fashoda."

Hanne continued on her way, through the establishment's

"Come."

"What is Fashoda, Grune?"

Shrug. "A place. Like Munich, Weimar, Kiel. A town, but

"What does
it have to do with women's jewelry?"

"Come in. The girls and I can't handle that herd."

"I see something. Do you? Floating over the park." From a

"Bitte . . ." Some common nostalgia - for the cities of h

Varkumian had been replaced by a young girl in a flowered

"I followed you," the girl said. "Papa would die if he fo

Pause. Then: "Your father was in a German church this aft
beer hall. Sir Alastair was listening to someone play Bac

She hung her head, a mustache of beer foam on her upper l

"You love Goodfellow," he said.

"Yes." Nearly a whisper.

"Whatever I may think," she said "I have guessed. You can

"What would you have me do, then?"

Twisting ringlets round her fingers: "Nothing. Only under

"How can you -" exasperated - "men can get killed, don't

It was not love. Hanne excused herself and left. It was r
with her. What could she tell Lepsius tonight. She had on

This from gentle Hanne Echerze. Had the world gone mad wi

VIII

The corridor runs by the curtained entrances to four boxe

A man wearing blue spectacles hurries into the second box

Two men turn the corner by the allegorical statue of Trag
is fat. They enter the box next to the one the man with t

The silence is total. So there's no warning when the red-
eyes tightly, tries to turn his head away from the light.

Another has been standing at the end of the corridor. Fro

Vision must be the last to go. There must also be a nearl

The half-crouched body collapses. The face and its masses

Chapter Four

In which Esther gets a nose job

Next evening, prim and nervous-thighed in a rear seat of a bus, she divided her attention between the delinquent wilderness of the city and the

The bus driver was of the normal or placid crosstown type, given life by vibrating air columns and strings, having the

The bus entered the sudden waste country of Central Park.

Suppose she were telepathic, and could tune in on what was

She touched the tip of her new nose delicately, in secret, might be watching as to make sure it was still there. The

What a brave girl I am, she trilled to herself, coming th

She got off at First Avenue and tap-tapped along the side to him.

"You are early," he said.

"I am late," she answered. Already stepping out of her sk

I

Schoenmaker, being conservative, referred to his professi

He'd received his impetus - like the racket itself - from

Well, the kid never
did get up in the air, but they made him a greasemonkey v

But then: it was a pure and abstract passion, directed fo

The war being what it was, certain of the faces - craggy
slicked-down hair or bald - never came back. To this the

Until Evan Godolphin. A liaison officer in his middle thi
of nineteenth-century gentlemen of war. Evan Godolphin wo

Godolphin became Schoenmaker's hero. Tokens tossed his way

The end came soon enough. One rainy afternoon toward to e
ground and slid like a kite in an air current toward the

Schoenmaker must have lost himself. The next he could rem

Now, luckily for some, a law of supply and demand had bee
case, in 1918, was hardly unique. Methods had been in exi

(Profane would see some of them under the street. Others
down one leg - how many women had looked and shied?; whos

Evan Godolphin proved to be one of them. The doctor was y

Thus Godolphin received a nose bridge of ivory, a cheekbo
had been perfect. He was being sent back to London, in so

"Take a long look. It won't be good for more than six mor

"Couldn't -" Schoenmaker's throat was dry - "couldn't the
somehow: start over . . ."

"Too rushed. I'm lucky to get what I got. I can't complai

"What will you do when -"

"I'm not thinking of that. But it will be a grand six months."

The young mechanic stayed in a kind of emotional limbo for

"How can I become a doctor."

Of course it was idealistic and uncomplex. He wanted only
- mechanic - as well as navy in a score of markets and w

If alignment with the inanimate is the mark of a Bad Guy,
bloodless theories about the "idea" of the plastic surgeon

II

Esther met him, oddly enough, through Stencil, who at the
Stencil, pursuing a different trail, happened for reasons

As is usual after certain frustrations, we react with benevolent
desire, no post-mortems necessary. It struck him with a force

Collected for her in the anteroom that day were a rogues' gallery
syphilis, whose bones had acquired lesions and had partial

This first day Schoenmaker spent in pre-operative reconnaissance

Next day she was back at the
once. The two casts were thereon his desk, side by side.

"Now," he smiled; producing like a magician a lump of mo

What else: Irish, she wanted, turned up. Like they all wa

A few artistic finger-flourishes and wrist-twistings.

"Would that be it?"

Eyes aglow, she nodded. "It has to harmonize with the res

"But," he'd been able to rationalize years before, "there

"Try next week then." He gave her the time. Esther was th

Next week she arrived, punctual: guts tight, skin sensit

Esther's face

was cleaned in the nasal region with green soap, iodine a

It was expected this would calm her down, but barbituric

"Quiet, schlep," said the doctor, scrubbing. Irving set a

All three wore surgical masks. The eyes looked suddenly m

Irving can be the anaesthetist. You need practice, babe.

Sterile towels were placed under Esther's head and a drop

Irving returned with the Novocain, a syringe, and a needle

No one had told Esther that anything about the operation
these injections hurt: nothing before in her experience h

Inside the nose again with another burden of anaesthetic,

A series of internal injections to the septum - the wall

After a while Schoenmaker started pinching and twisting E
no: Schoenmaker twisted harder: "Hurt?" No. "Okay. Cover

"Maybe she wants to look," Trench said.

"You want to look, Esther? See what we're going to do you

"I don't know." Her voice was weak, teetering between her

"Watch, then," said Schoenmaker. "Get an education. First

It was a routine operation; Schoenmaker worked quickly, r

Schoenmaker first made two incisions, one on either side and closing. Quickly, like a barber finishing up a high-t

Irving passed him a chisel-like instrument. "MacKenty's e

"Now," gently, like a lover, "I'm going to saw off your h
that; I felt myself drifting down, this delicious loss of

The mask with the clay nose lay on a small table nearby.

"Your hump is now two loose pieces
of bone, attached only to the septum. We have to cut that

"And now the hump floats inside the nose." He pulled back

So much for the hump. But where the hump had been was now
to begin with, and now had to be narrowed.

Again he undermined the nasal bones, this time around to

He sawed through the nasal bones on each side, separating

"Let me know if you feel anything." He gave the chisel a
was broken free of the forehead. By pushing in from eithe

"See? It's all wobbly now. That's act two. Now ve shorten

With a scalpel he made an incision around the septum, bet

"Which should give you a free-floating septum. We use sci

He passed a scalpel next into one of the incisions just i
with a pair of straight scissors Schoenmaker snipped off

Keeping one eye on the mask, he brought together the nasa

The "seam" was between the recently-cut edge of the septu

The operation had taken, in all; less than an hour. They
tubes were put in each nostril so she could breathe.

Two days later the packing was removed. The adhesive plas

III

That would have been all: except for Esther. Possibly her

Returning the following week to have the stitches removed
she crossed and uncrossed her legs, batted eyelashes, tal

"Come back tomorrow," he told her. Irving was off. Esther

In the back room: "How do you feel."

She laughed, too loud. "It hurts. But."

"Yes, but. There are ways to forget the pain."

She seemed unable to get rid of a silly, half-apologetic

"Do you know what we're going to do? No, what I am going

She let him undress her. He commented only on a black gar

"Oh. Oh God." An attack of conscience: Slab had given it

"Stop. Stop the peep-show routine. You're not
a virgin."

Another self-deprecating laugh. "That's just it. Another

She's in shock, he thought, vaguely surprised.

"Come. We'll make believe it's your operation. You enjoye

Through a crack in the curtains opposite Trench looked on

"No," she cried.

"You have worked on many ways of saying no. No meaning ye

"No," with a little moan.

"Different. Again."

"No," this time a smile, eyelids at half-mast.

"Again."

"No."

"You're getting better." Unknotting his tie, trousers in

Have I told you, fella

She's got the sweetest columella

And a septum that's swept 'em all on their
ass;

Each casual chondrectomy

Meant only a big fat check to me

Till I sawed this osteoclastible lass:

[Refrain]:

Till you've cut into Esther

You've cut nothing at all;

She's one of the best, Thir,

To her nose I'm in thrall.

She never acts nasty

But lies still as a rock;

She loves my rhinoplasty

But the others are schlock.

Esther is passive,

Her aplomb is massive,

How could any poor ass've

Ever passed her by?

And let me to you say

She puts Ireland to shame;

For her nose is retrousse

And Esther's her name . . .

For the last eight bars she chanted "no" on one and three

Such was the (as it were) the Jacobean etiology of Esther

Chapter Five

In which Stencil nearly goes West with an alligator

I

This alligator was pinto: pale white, seaweed black. It m
or old or stupid. Profane thought maybe it was tired of l

The chase had been going on since nightfall. They were in

From time to time his quarry would half-turn, coy, enticing
danger from ricochets.

It wouldn't be his first kill. He'd been on the job two w

"Okay, there, Rodriguez, yeah. I guess we can take you."
of Harlem or a little sea-level warmth, sneaking glances
at the Oswiecim extermination camp, an eye taken by the k

They worked in teams of two. One held the flashlight, the
to get caught in the blast.

Each hunter got an armband - a Zeitsuss idea. ALLIGATOR B
board and a reading light over his desk. The place looked

"One good provolone, she says."

"I got her good provolone. Why can't she do shopping hers

"Did you see Ed Sullivan last night, hey Andy. He had thi

From another part of the city; "And Speedy Gonzales says,

"Ha, ha."

And: "You ought to be over here on the East Side: There i

"It all has a zipper on it, over on the East Side."

"That is how come yours is so short?"

"It is not how much
you got, it's how you use it."

Naturally there was unpleasantness from the FCC, who ride

Sometimes now when they mustered out in front of the cand
to see if it was melted sleet running down his face, or t

"You guys," he said, "some of you been here since this Pa

"Well today, they chopped us down again. Each team will b
all I'm saying is, only get the sure kills, don't waste y

"Just keep going the way you have. I am proud of you guys

They all shuffled around, embarrassed. Zeitsuss didn't sa
done, but in whispers so quiet their partner didn't even

So far as Profane knew, Zeitsuss didn't know who he was,
It was a job, not a Patrol. He'd learned how to work a re

Angel was singing: "Mi corazon, esta tan solo, mi corazon

"Knock it off," Profane said. "If Bung the foreman is up

"I hate Bung the foreman," Angel said. He began to laugh.

"Shush," Profane said. Bung the foreman had carried a wal
He didn't talk much except to give orders. One phrase he

Ahead of them the alligator lumbered, forlorn. It was mov

"Chinga tu madre," said Angel pleasantly.

"Report," said Bung.

"He's moving off," Profane called from below.

"We're after one now," Angel said.

"You're drunk," Bung said.

"No," said Angel.

"Yes,"
cried Bung, "I'm the foreman."

"Angel," Profane said. "Come on, we'll lose him."

"I'm sober," Angel said. It occurred to him how nice it m

"I am going to write you up," said Bung, "I smell booze o

Angel started climbing out of the manhole. "I would like

"What are you guys doing," Profane said, "playing potsy?"

"Carry on," Bung called into the hole. "I am detaining yo

"Now what the hell," Profane said. He swung the flashlight sashaying around the next bend. He shrugged. "Carry on, y

He moved away from the manhole, carrying the gun safeties

Nearly as he could figure, he was on the East Side, uptown

They angled to the left, half uptown. The water began to his beat had covered the breadlines and missions, where h Parish. These benisons made sure of an adequate supply of

Accordingly, he built himself a small shelter on one bank communicate with the rats. Presumably he succeeded. An en

'Ignatius is proving a very difficult student indeed. He

"And what," inquired Ignatius, "is this superabundant sat

Again I read: "That which they gained during their lifeti

"Aha," crowed Ignatius, "then I cannot see how this differ to explain that there were different sorts of communism:

Evidently he converted at least one batch. There is no fu enclave of light in a howling Dark Age of ignorance and b

Rat meat didn't agree with the Father, in the long run. E

'When Augustine is mayor of the city (for he is a splendid
found in the New City whose foundations we lay here, in t

The journal ends here. It is still preserved in an inacce

"Maybe," said Zeitsuss's predecessor Manfred Katz after m

The stories, by the time Profane heard them, were pretty
than the record itself warranted. At no point in the twen

Profane had moved across the frontier, the alligator stil

He swung the beam over
the old inscriptions, saw a dark stain shaped like a cruc

What had interested him most were the accounts of Veronic
a penance. Something to keep. Veronica was none of your t

'My little joke may have been in earnest. When they are e

V. came to me tonight, upset. She and Paul have been at i

V. has expressed a desire to be a sister. I explained to

Lamb of God, Profane thought. Did the priest teach them '
How would he feel about me or the Alligator Patrol? He ch

His back throbbed, he was getting tired. Beginning to work the walls of legend. It was no place to kill. He felt the eyes

Suddenly - so suddenly it scared him - there was light above

"Wha," he said out loud. Backwash from the river? Sea water?

He waited. He was waiting for something to happen. Something of course. He was sentimental and superstitious. Surely there

"Ah, schlemiel," he whispered into the phosphorescence. A

In Independence Hall in Philly, when the floor was rebuilt right there, or even George Washington." Profane on an ed

"I'm sorry," he told the alligator. He was always saying

II

Gouverneur ("Roony") Winsome sat on his grotesque espresso Drive, ran to something like thirteen rooms, all decorated

Mafia his wife was in on the bed playing with Fang the cat

Oh, man, thought Winsome, an intellectual. I had to pick

The string was from Bloomingdale's, fine quality: procure
string smokers, on the same level as Chivas Regal Scotch

Roony was an executive for Outlandish Records (Volkswagen
out about. It seemed Winsome had been putting out feelers

"Why," said the CIA man in the gray suit.

"Why not," said Winsome.

"Why," said the CIA man in the blue suit.

Winsome told them.

"My God," they said, blanching in unison.

"It would have to be the one dropped on Moscow, naturally

The cat let loose a nerve-jangling scream. Charisma came

"No," said Winsome. "You guessed wrong again. It is midni

"Where is Fu," from under the blanket.

"Out rollicking," said Winsome, "downtown."

"Roon"

the girl squealed, "come in and look at him." The cat was

Winsome made no comment. The green mound in the middle of

The Eskimos, Winsome reflected, consider it good hostmans

"Mukluk," he said aloud. He reckoned it was an Eskimo wor

The cat came flying through the air, into the espresso ma
you had to take off her. "I am going to work for a while,

His wife was an authoress. Her novels - three to date - r

If the two of them ever did get around to making a final

In practice, Heroic Love meant screwing five or six times
which Mafia thought was a pretty good line. It appeared i

All her characters fell into this disturbingly predictabl
emotions. Winsome was too upset to tell her it was not a

If she believed in Heroic Love, which is nothing really b

Now Winsome had been brought up on the white Protestant s
Sly, however, she waited, and the whole contraceptive rig

The only grounds for divorce in New York state is adultery

Charisma was in the shower, splashing
around. Was he wearing the green blanket in there? Winsom

"Hey," called Mafia from the writing desk. "How do you sp

"Roony, have you seen my roommate. The young one." He had

"Or Stencil."

"Stencil has not been here all week," Winsome said. "He i

Rachel sounded upset: her breathing, something. "Would th

"No telling what Stencil is doing," said Winsome, "but I

Charisma was standing
in the bathroom, wrapped in the blanket, observing his te

"Where is Stencil," said Winsome.

"He sent a note yesterday, by a vagrant in an old campaign

"Don't slouch," Winsome's wife said as he chugged back to

"Ei-gen-value!" moaned Charisma. The bathroom had a delay

"The what," Rachel said.

"None of us," Winsome told her, "have ever inquired into

"Paola," Rachel said, "is a very sick girl." She hung up,
out the door wearing Rachel's white leather raincoat.

"You could have asked me," Rachel said. The girl was alwa

"Where are you going at this hour," Rachel wanted to know

"Oh, out." Vaguely. If she had any guts, Rachel thought,
taken a Brody off some bridge, overpass or high building.

"Was that me?" out loud. Esther had left. "So," she conti

Somebody was banging on the door. She opened it to Fu and

"This is Pig Bodine," said Fu.

"Isn't it a small world," said Pig Bodine. "I'm looking f

"So am I," said Rachel. "And what are you, playing Cupid

Pig tossed his white hat at the desk lamp, scoring ringer
is Crew talk for Make Yourself At Home.

"Pappy is over in the Med," said Pig, lying on the couch.

"How come then you aren't over in the Med, wherever that

"I am AWOL," said Pig. He closed his eyes. Fu came back w

"Pig has this remarkably acute nose," Fu said, putting an

"How did you two get together," Rachel asked, seating her
out of the corners of his mouth, formed brief pools in th

"If you had been down the Spoon at all, you would know,"

"I'll bet Pig is the darling of the Rusty Spoon," said Ra

Pig removed the bottle from his mouth, where it had been

Rachel smiled. "Perhaps your friend would like to hear some guitar, banjo and vocalist:

"Last night I went and raced with the Highway Patrol

But that Pontiac done had more guts than mine.

And so I wrapped my tail around a telephone pole

And now my baby she just sits a cryin'.

I'm up in heaven, darlin', now don't you cry;

Ain't no reason why you should be blue.

Just go on out and race a cop in Daddy's old Ford

And you can join me up in heaven, too."

Pig's right foot had begun to wobble, roughly in time with

"There's nothing I love," said Pig and paused. Rachel did

"Oh," she shouted; not wanting to get on the subject but

"We kicked a few jarheads," Pig bellowed over the music, "which is about t

"I didn't. Your interest in her is purely Platonic, is th

"Wha," said Pig.

"No screwing," Fu explained.

"I wouldn't do that to anybody but an officer," Pig said.

"Well, I don't know where she is," Rachel yelled. "I wish

Which did not surprise her: after all he had been hanging around the Spoon. For

"The vagrant minstrel Ling, having insinuated himself int

At half past one the phone rang. It was Stencil.

"Stencil's just been shot at," he said.

Private eye, indeed. "Are you all right, where are you." and wait, she said. "We'll come get you."

"He can't sit down, you know." He hung up.

"Come," she said, grabbing her coat. "Fun, excitement, th

Fu whistled, giggled. "Those leads are beginning to fight

Stencil had called from a Hungarian coffee shop on York A

Stencil was in an embarrassing and possibly dangerous pos
He wasn't especially anxious to sit down. He'd stowed the

Stencil left the phone booth and edged his right buttock

That was the worst part of it. He and Zeitsuss had met on
irregulars. These looked like revolutionaries.

He crossed the street. The group broke up and wandered av

"You're a Limey," Zeitsuss said. "Last Limey we had wrest

Naturally Stencil asked try what, and so the contact was
group, talking sewers. Somewhere in the Paris dossier, St

Persuasive and charming even in a wrinkled suit and nasce
wanted to see of Fairing's Parish.

Two cups of coffee later the cop left and five minutes af

Chapter Six

In which Profane returns to street level

I

Women had always happened to Profane the schlemiel like a
animals, bums on the street, near-dying and lost to God,

But as usual he was wrong. His first indication came with

"I don't have a suit," Profane said.

They gave him one of Angel's. It was too small and he fel

"Sleep in the daytime," Geronimo said, "ho-ho. You crazy,

Fina came in all warm and sleepy-eyed; heard they were ho
knew. Girls are different from cono. Angel brightened.

The six of them started at an after-hours club up near 12

Soon Fina's eyes changed from sleepy to shiny from wine,
touched and whispered, "Benito," her breath light and aci

"Josephine," he nodded, pleasant. He was getting a headac
his foot. He was too tired to yell. He limped off to a ta

He lost count of all the bars they visited. He became dru

In the next few days Profane came to tally his time in re
of getting involved with Fina as assbreaking, wageless la

What had he said in that phone booth? The question met hi

"Benito," she said one night, "how come we never talk."

"Wha," said Profane, who was watching a Randolph Scott mo

"Sure. Nice dress. How about more coffee. I got me anothe

He knew what she meant. Now here was Randolph Scott: cool
other side of the phosphor screen was Profane, who knew t

"Why don't we go to a movie or something," she said.

"This here," he answered, "is a good movie. Randolph Scott

She withdrew after a while, sad and pouting.

Why? Why did she have to behave like he was a human being

But curious, he decided to ask Angel.

"How do I know," Angel said. "It's her business. She don't
in the office. They are all maricon, she says. Except for

"What does she want to be," Profane said, "a career girl?

"My mother thinks everybody should get married: me, Fina,

"Playboys," Profane said. "Wha."

It came out then that Fina was spiritual leader or Den Mo

Profane knew better than to ask whether she was giving th
women - was a harmless way to be what maybe every girl wa

The Playboys were a strangely exhausted group. Mercenarie
name discreetly lettered small and bloody on the back; fa

Profane didn't meet them in any social way until the Feast
one halfway along. Popular songs, operas. Not too loud in

Profane, Angel and Geronimo were out prowling for cono. I
the foreman whereby you didn't know till the day before w

He wasn't comfortable in this street. The people mobbing

"A lot of nice asses, though," Angel said.

"Look, look," said Geronimo. Three jailbait, all lipstick

"Benito, you speak guinea. Go tell them how about a littl

Behind them the band was playing Madame Butterfly. Non-pr

"It isn't like it was a foreign country," Profane said.

"Geronimo is a tourist,"

Angel said. "He wants to go down to San Juan and live in

They'd been moseying slow, casing the jailbait at the whe

Angel waved. "He goes weak in the knees," Geronimo purred

The giggling got louder. Somewhere else the American ensi

"Benny here talks guinea," said Angel. "Say something in

"Sfacim," Profane said. The girls got all shocked.

"Your
friend is a nasty mouth," one of them said.

"I don't want to sit with any nasty mouth," said the girl

"That's his name," Geronimo said, "is all. And I am Peter

"Benny Sfacim is really your name?" said the one in the s

"Sfacimento." In Italian it meant destruction or decay. "

"That's
all right then," she said. "That isn't bad at all." Bet y

The eyes of a New York woman [he started to sing]

Are the twilit side of the moon,

Nobody knows what goes on back
there

Where it's always late afternoon.

Under the lights of Broadway,

Far from the lights of home,

With a smile as sweet as a candy cane

And a heart all plated with chrome.

Do they ever see the wandering bums

And the boys with no place to go,

And the drifter who cried for an ugly girl

That he left in Buffalo?

Dead as the leaves in Union Square,

Dead as the graveyard sea,

The eyes of a New York woman

Are never going to cry for me.

Are never going to cry for me.

The girl on the sidewalk twitched. "It doesn't have any of
my beat. They're all noise.

Zeppole man across the street began to sing. Angel and Ger

Non dimenticar, the t'i'ho voluto tanto bene,

Ho saputo amar; non dimenticar . . .

And the cold street seemed all at once to've bloomed into
"What do you guys do," Lucille said.

I tell tall stories to girls I want to screw, Profane tho

"Wha."

He told her about the alligators; Angel, who had a fertil

Geronimo came back with beer. They sat and drank beer and

"Oh God," said Profane.

"You have to chase her," said
one of her friends. Angel and Geronimo were laughing.

"I have to wha," said Profane. The other two girls, annoy

"Chase them?" Geronimo said.

Angel belched. "Sweat out some of this beer." They got of

"Over there." It seemed after a while they were knocking

"Nobody
here," said Angel.

There was music on Mott Street. Coming out of a basement.

The three of them just stood. Profane saw Lucille after a

He happened to glance off to the left. There was a coat r
Hanging on a row of hooks, neat and uniform, padded shoul

Angel and Geronimo had been looking the same way. "Do you

"Wait a minute," he said. He weaved between the couples o

"What took you so long?" She had him by the hand. It was

"They've all been said," she whispered. In the dim light mouth open, teeth all white, sharp, ready to sink into wh

There was a sudden scream from the next room, somebody kn

"Rumble?" Profane said. She came flying off the table, kn chairs and the cord to the jukebox.

Crouched behind the brownstone balusters of the front sto

Like tinsel suddenly tossed on a Christmas tree, the merr

It never happened, whatever they were waiting for: not tonight. Out of nowhere Fina, St. Fina of the PL

Profane gaped, snuffled, and slunk away. For the next wee Fina could find herself on the receiving end of a gang ba

One evening he came into the bathroom, mattress slung ove

"Now look," he said.

"Benny, I'm cherry. I want it to be you." She said it def

"Why me," he said. "You save it for the guy you marry."

"Who wants to get married," she said.

"Look, what is Sister Maria Annunziata going to think. He would ever be arguing like this? Her eyes burned, she twi

"No," said Profane. "Now hop out of there, I want to go t

She climbed out of the bathtub and put a robe around her.

II

Profane's worries about Fina turned real and ugly, soon e

More and more Profane was coming to feel a stranger to the world downstairs. It had probably happened as impe

Your ass, answered his devil's advocate. How many times h

He thought back to the one he'd chased solo almost to the in some prehistoric circuit of the alligator brain they k

When he went down for his now four hours a day he talked at him to get out of the way and pumped all five rounds i

Finally, one night in mid-April, he admitted to himself w

Fina had been aware that there weren't many alligators le
would soon be jobless. She came upon Profane one evening

"Benito," she said, "you ought to start looking around fo

Profane agreed. She told him her boss, Winsome of Outland

"Me," Profane said, "I'm not a clerk. I'm not smart enough

A schlemiel is a schlemiel. What can you "make" out of on
now she was turning the other cheek. He began to get lewo

Next day she called up. Angel and Geronimo were on day sh

"Find a suit," she said. "One o'clock is your interview."

"Wha," said Profane. He'd grown fatter after these weeks

Old Mendoza didn't mind. The biggest suit in the closet w
around him were people in new suits, millions of inanimat

The Outlandish office was in the Grand Central area, sever

As he handed the completed form to the girl at the desk,

Maybe Profane had seen him under the street or at one of
and it was as if this messenger had brought a message to

He listened to the wind. The messenger left. "Mr. Winsome

Friday at the shapeup Zeitsuss, almost crying, gave them
on, only two days a week operation, only five teams for s

They stayed till near 9:30 or 10, when a few of the girls

The first wave of girls came in to get change for the eve
and cordial as if they were young lovers, which in a way

Profane, Angel and Geronimo left after talking with the g

"You seen your sister?" she asked Angel. "She was going t

Kook came running up. "Dolores says she's out with the PL
looking at him. When Mrs. Mendoza was gone, Angel said, "

Profane didn't say he'd been thinking the same thing. Ang

"They're all over the city," Geronimo said. "I know a cou

"Jesus Christ," Geronimo said. A full-scale rumble was on with the controls of a tape recorder. A sound man was up

"Howdy," said the tweed suit. "My name is Winsome."

"My sister's boss," Angel whispered. Profane heard a scre

They cased the street for a clubhouse. Soon they found PE
Behind them the street was chaos. A few bodies lay prostr

Angel opened a door at the end of the hall and for half a

Angel might have been satisfied only with her life, Profane

He wouldn't

go back to Mendozas', he figured. There was no more work

Chapter Seven

She hangs on the western wall

Dudley Eigenvalue, D.D.S., browsed among treasures in his the enthusiast, Stencil, said. And believed.

For those who keep an eye on such things, bright little f

It appeared actually to have been little more than a char

The pulp is soft, and laced with little blood vessels and is inanimate. These were the it and I psychodontia had to

Eigenvalue, enchanted by the titanium's dull spark, brood

Cavities in the teeth occur for good reason, Eigenvalue r

Intercom blinked gently. "Mr. Stencil," it said. So. What doctor suggested, solicitous.

"Nothing wrong with the teeth," Stencil got out. "You mus

From behind his desk, in the office, Eigenvalue said, "Yo

"It isn't espionage," Stencil protested, "but the Situati

"You think you've frightened them?"

"Please." The man was ashen. He produced a pipe and pouch

"You presented the Alligator Patrol to me," said Eigenvalue
had filled the pipe and was lighting it. "You've conceived

"Suppose it was prosthetics," taking Eigenvalue by surprise

"Come," said Eigenvalue. They entered a rear
office, where the museum was. Here were a pair of forceps

"Whose," said Stencil, looking at the dentures.

"Like Cinderella's prince," Eigenvalue smiled, "I'm still

"And Stencil, possibly. It would be something she'd wear.

"I made them," said Eigenvalue. "Anybody you'd be looking

"How does Stencil know."

"That I'm telling the truth? Tut, Mr. Stencil."

The false teeth in the case smiled too, twinkling as if in

Back in the office, Eigenvalue, to see what he could see,

But

the conversational tone didn't take Stencil aback, he did

The afternoon curled outside, with only a little wind to

"Yes. But found out hardly more than Stencil has told you
in the airy Renaissance spaces of that city, assumed into

Perhaps history this century, thought Eigenvalue, is ripped
the funny-looking automobiles of the '30's, the curious f

I

In April of 1899 young Evan Godolphin, daft with the spirit
to meet his old father, Captain Hugh, F.R.G.S. and explorer
was a characteristic acquired from the age, and Evan was

At Deauville, recuperating after two months of goodnature
to find a telegram from Captain Hugh which said; "Hear yo

Vheissu, of course. A summons he couldn't ignore, Vheissu
late to examining everything in print - menus, railway ti

He would see his father. In spite
of the heart's vagrancy, the cerise umbrella, the madcap

The cab swung left, crossing the tram tracks with two bonnet wheels and turning right again into Via dei Vechietti. Evan shook four fingers.

"Signorina," he cried, "ah, brava fanciulla, sei tu inglese."

She blushed and began to study the embroidery on her parasol. They were in Via Pecori. He looked back and saw the girl again.

II

In front of a wine shop on the Ponte Vecchio sat Signor Mantissa.

Signor Mantissa was not paying attention. His five feet tall figure - even Cellini - shrouded now in dark serge and waiting for a sense of frailness, a poet-liberal. But if he kept watching the river.

The reason was obvious and disappointing: simply that Signor Mantissa was old and decay. He mused inviolate by the serene river of Italy.

Cesare drank from the wine bottle. He sang:

Il piove, dolor mia

Ed anch'io piango . . .

"No," said Signor Mantissa, waving away the bottle. "No m

"There are two English ladies," Cesare cried. "I will sin

"For God's sake -"

Vedi,
donna vezzosa, questo poveretto,

Sempre cantante d'amore come -

"Be quiet, can't you."

"-un vaporetto." Triumphantly he boomed a hundred-cycle m

After a while Signor Mantissa reached under his chair, co

"Here is the Gaucho," he said. A tall, lumbering person i

Biting his thumb irritably at Cesare, Signor Mantissa fou

"Broglia," Signor Mantissa said, "the finest."

The Gaucho fiddled absently with his hatbrim. Then burst

were superfluous. I'm sorry, I have many objections. It is

Signor Mantissa drank, wiped his mustaches, smiled painfully

"You, my friend," the Gaucho said menacingly, prodding Signor Mantissa to stow away. From there on in, assert yourself. Be a man.

Signor Mantissa, skewered like a butterfly, flapped his arms

"Certo io," he finally managed to say, "of course, signor

"Pah!" The Gaucho disengaged the corkscrew, sat glaring at

"Last year in Venezuela it was not like this. Nowhere in the world conflict was simple: we wanted liberty, they didn't want it.

Signor Mantissa had regained some of his composure. "It is

"And he is the pig," the Gaucho roared, clapping Cesare on the shoulder. "Bravo! A fine cadre."

"Pig," said Cesare happily, making a grab for the wine bottle

"No more," the Gaucho said. "The signor here has taken the most detestable cunning of the Medici, who suppressed freedom

"If -" again the pained smile - "if the commendatore has

"Of course there's another plan," the Gaucho retorted, "t

Signor Mantissa pointed to the lower left-hand corner. "T
we enter a smaller one here, marked 'Ritratti diversi.' A

"A single entrance which is also the single exit," the Ga

"There is a lift," said Signor Mantissa, "leading to a pa

"A lift," the Gaucho sneered. "About what I'd expect from
a corner. But even this isn't confining enough for you. Y

"Besides which," Cesare put in, "she's so big."

The Gaucho clenched one fist. "How big."

"175 by 279 centimeters," admitted Signor Mantissa.

"Capo di minghe!" The Gaucho sat back, shaking his head.
left over for her elephant of a mother to act as chaperon

"Calm, commendatore," Signor Mantissa pleaded. "Anyone mi

"Florist. Florist: you've let a florist into your confide

"But he is safe. He is only providing the tree."

"The tree."

"The Judas tree. Small: some four meters, no taller. Cesa

"Forgive what may be my appalling stupidity," the Gaucho
past an army of guards who will soon be aware of its thef

"Precisely. Early evening would be the best time -"

"A rivederci."

Signor Mantissa leaped to his feet. "I beg you, commendat

"Forgive me," the Gaucho said, "you are both lunatics."

"But your cooperation is essential. We need a lion, someo

"Very well." The Gaucho retraced his steps and stood towe

"Heavily barred."

"No matter. A bomb, a small bomb, which I'll provide. Any

The window should let us out next to the Posta Centrale.

"Under the Ponte San Trinita."

"Some four or five hundred yards up the Lungarno. We can

"But the tree, commendatore. It cost close to 200 lire."

"Damn your tree." With a smart about-face the Gaucho turn

The sun hovered over the Arno. Its declining rays tinged

Cesare let a consoling arm fall round Signor Mantissa's t
He's been in the jungles too long. He doesn't understand.

"She is so beautiful," Signor Mantissa whispered.

"Davvero. And I love her too. We are comrades in love." S

III

Miss Victoria Wren, late of Lardwick-in-the-Fen, Yorks.,
was at the time of the Fashoda crisis) for her deflowerin

Support after that was readily available. By prudent saving and a lady of enterprise, she found herself acquiring political influence by which any young girl chooses a dress or gewgaw of a party.

Now she did not regard her time with Goodfellow or with the Count. And he would continue to perform his husband's duties through her.

She arose and walked down the center aisle to the rear of the church.

"You are English," he said.

"I am."

"You must help me. I am in trouble. I can't go to the Count."

He didn't look like a beggar or a hard-up tourist. She was sure.

The old man laughed mirthlessly. "Yes. In a way I am engaged in espionage. But against my will, you know. I didn't want to."

Distraught: "I want to confess, don't you see? I'm in a corner."

"Come," she whispered.

"Not outside," he said. "The cafés are being watched."

She took his arm. "There is a garden in the back, I think

He let her guide him, docile. A priest was kneeling in the snow and began:

"I don't expect you've ever heard of a place called Vheissu.

She had not.

He started telling her about Vheissu. How it was reached,

"Then you have been there," she said.

He had been there. Fifteen years ago. And the world had been fury-ridden since. Even in the Antarctic, huddling in the dark.

"You are Godolphin," she said, as if she had always known him.

He nodded, smiled vaguely. "I hope you are not connected with the war."

"Brave things," she protested. "I've read about them. In the papers."

"But things which did not have to be done. The trek along the coast for the Pole in June. June down there is midwinter. It was

"It was grand." Another minute, he thought hopelessly, and

"We can always so easily give the wrong reasons," he cried

She smiled secretly. "And you did not?" she asked gently.

"I did. Until . . ."

"Yes."

"But why? Have you never harrowed yourself halfway to - o
with that single word? Why." His cigar had gone out. He p

She had been gazing at him. The parasol leaned against th

"The colors. So many colors." His eyes were tightly close
same color from one hour to the next. No sequence of col

She was taken by surprise: her laugh was high and brittle

"And beneath?"

"You mean soul don't you. Of course you do. I wondered ab

"It's all right."

"Civilians have curious ideas about the military, but I e
there's some justice to what they think about us. This id

"Go on." She was watching him, rapt.

"But as if the place were, were a woman you had found som

"And you would be in love with her."

"At first. But soon that skin, the gaudy godawful riot of
would begin to get between you and whatever it was in her
into rout or mindlessness. I'd always had friends on the

Mercifully, he did not catch sight of her comb.

"Did you get maps of Vheissu?"

He hesitated. "No," he said. "No data ever got back, eith
Only a report of failure. Bear in mind: It was bad countri

"And your second-in-command?"

"He is, he is in hospital. Retired now." There was a sile

Victoria was tapping her foot absently. "And all this has

Suddenly he looked older. The cigar had gone out again. He

Realizing

that he was afraid of her, she leaned forward, intent. "T

The old man began to bite at his nails; slowly and method

IV

The

eighth floor at Piazza delta Signoria 5 was murky and sme

Evan - even the boy - had never pressed his father for de
had been aware that the expedition was a failure, caught
his stomach. Words came back to him: unwise to say too mu

"All right then young Evan," he muttered to himself, "we
on the inside of the cigarette paper was: "Discovered her

Evan looked at his watch. Now what in the devil was all t
he should do. His feet hung two yards away from and sever
almost as loony as his father. By the time he reached the

Before he knew it he'd been flanked by two policemen. "Yo

Evan came aware, protesting automatically.

"Those are our orders, cavaliere." Evan caught a slight r

"Would you mind telling me -" Evan began.

They were sorry, they could give him no information. He w

"I demand to see the English Consul-General."

"But cavaliere, how do we know you are English? This pass

Flesh began to crawl on the back of his neck. He had suddo
can give a satisfactory explanation," he said, "I am at y

"Certainly, cavaliere." They walked across the square and

V

Earlier that day, the Venezuelan Consulate had been in an

"Be reasonable," urged Salazar, the Vice-Consul. "The wor

"Bombs," screamed Raton, his chief. "Destruction, pillage, rape, chaos. They can take us over, stage a coup

The Vice-Consul opened his desk drawer and produced a bot

"He is in on it," Raton said, slurping wine. "I have inqu

"Gauchos are in Argentina," Salazar observed soothingly. of the French gauche. Perhaps he is left-handed."

"It is all we have to go on," Raton said obstinately. "It

Salazar sighed. "What is it you want to do?"

"Enlist help from the government police here. What other

Salazar refilled the tumblers. "First," he said, "interna

"We can have them place a cordon of guardie around us, ou

"Es posible," the Vice-Consul shrugged. "But secondly, i

"Whimsy!" shouted Raton.

"Have I not seen this sinister figure with my own eyes?"

"Of course," Salazar said peevishly, "if I am no longer p

"You would not know. Perhaps they do not know at Rome. You

"If it were only your job, I would say, fine: call in the

"And
then," Raton chuckled, "that idiot clerk can take over bo

Salazar was not mollified. "I wonder," he said thoughtful

Raton glowered. "I am still your superior."

"Very well then, your excellency -" spreading his hands h

"Contact the government police at once. Outline the situa

"That is all?"

"You might request that this Gaucho be put under apprehen

They caught up with the
Gaucho finally in the Uffizi. He'd been lounging against
still-tolerant smile to see four guardie heading into the

They surrounded him and a tenente with a beard informed h

"I could take all four of you," the Gaucho said. His mind took two short rights into a long passageway. He didn't remember

"Over the Ponte Vecchio to the Pitti Gallery," the tenente said. The colony, who were centered in the northeast part of the city, had been, after all, only two years since settlement of the

Imbecile!

Wasn't the Venezuelan Consulate located only some fifty meters away? As an instigator it wouldn't be prudent to remain at the scene

This was all assuming, of course, that he could talk his way out

"May I ask a favor," the Gaucho said, feigning embarrassment

"All right," the tenente growled. "Angelo, you keep an eye on him." He trailed down the hall after Angelo, who opened the door for him

"Quite true," the guardia said. "And the windows are opaque

"Mille grazie." The Gaucho removed his blindfold and was

"Hurry up," Angelo said.

"Are you going to watch?" the Gaucho asked, indignant. "Of course," he replied. In reply he entered a stall and shut the door behind him. "He

"You decided to wear it after all," Angelo said.

"Testing my marksmanship." They both laughed. The tenente

Soon he was in a private office, seated on a hard wooden

"You are the Gaucho," he said.

"We can speak English if you like," the Gaucho said. Three guardie had withdrawn. The tenente and three plainclothes

"You are perceptive," the balding man said.

The Gaucho decided to give at least the appearance of hon

The balding man smiled wistfully. "I am not the Consul-Ge

"Then I would guess," the Gaucho guessed, "that you are f

"Possibly. Since you seem to be of the inner circle in th

The possibility of a private arrangement with this man su

"And we can talk honestly."

The
Gaucho nodded again, grinning.

"Then let us start," the balding man said, "by your telling

The Gaucho tugged perplexedly at one ear. Perhaps he had

"I thought we had agreed not to fence. I said Vheissu."

All at once the Gaucho, for the first time since the jung

The balding man sighed. "Very well." He shuffled papers a

VI

When old Godolphin awoke it was to a wash of red sunset t
bouffant dress hanging on the door of the armoire, to a c
He had stepped into the confessional and found himself in

If you value your well-being as much as I do, please do r

He balled the paper up in his fist, flung it across the r
been jolly chums, riding arrogant on his epaulets like gu
it unfortunate: it seemed to have given her some quaint a

Forcing the door with the shears took only half a minute. every shift in course.

He turned right and headed toward the Duomo. Tourists saw suspect the suicidal fact that below the glittering integ at this point perhaps than even he could dream; but nearl

Footsteps behind him. On passing the next street lamp he

For no good reason he could see, life returned to him all and went dashing off down a narrow, twisting side street. over the rooftops. By the time he gained the roof the voi

Signor Mantissa glanced up, startled. "Minghe," he said, retreated behind a fan palm after resecurig the door.

"A long way from Port Said," Signor Mantissa said.

"Not so far," Godolphin said, "nor so long."

Here was the sort of friendship which doesn't decay, howe the half-world behind Port Said's Europeanized boulevards

"What is it, my friend," Signor Mantissa said now.

"Do you remember, once," Godolphin said, "a place, I told

Signor Mantissa made a sympathetic moue. "That again," he

"You have business now. I'll tell you later."

"No, nothing. This matter of a Judas tree."

"I have no more," Gadrulfi the florist muttered. "I've be

"He's holding out," Cesare said ominously. "Two hundred a

Godolphin smiled. "What chicanery with the law requires a

Without

hesitation Signor Mantissa explained. "And now," he concl

Godolphin whistled. "You leave Florence tonight then."

"One way or the other, on the river barge at midnight, si

"And there would be room far one more?"

"My friend." Signor Mantissa gripped him by the biceps. "

"Let me make up the extra fifty lire," he said.

"I could not allow -"

"Nonsense. Get the Judas tree." Sullenly the florist pock

"The
three of us can handle it," Cesare said. "Where to?"

"The Ponte Vecchio," Signor Mantissa said. "And then to S

They formed a triangle around the tree and lifted. The fl

"Andiam'," Signor Mantissa cried. The horses moved off at

"I am to meet my son at Scheissvogel's in a few hours," C

Signor Mantissa took a sharp right expertly. "Ridiculous,
me. You are safe with Mantissa, I will defend your life a

Cesare was uncorking a bottle of wine and singing an old

VII

The Englishman who had questioned the Gaucho was named St
like darts, at a large photograph of the current Foreign

The door suddenly burst open and a rangy man, prematurely

Stencil glanced up quizzically, a pen poised in his hand.

"At the Savoy. A girl, a young English girl. Has him lock

"Go check it out, then," Stencil interrupted. "Though he'

"Don't you want to see her?"

"Pretty?"

"Rather."

"No then. Things are bad enough as it is, if you
see my point. I'll leave her to you, Demivolt."

"Bravo, Sidney. Dedicated to duty, aren't you. St. George

Stencil smiled. "You're acting like a chorus boy. Perhaps

Demivolt smiled woefully. "It makes The Situation halfway

Stencil gritted his teeth. Oh, The Situation. The bloody

year along came the Fashoda crisis, and quite early one m

He had decided long ago that no Situation had any objecti
This had led to the near-obsession with teamwork which ha

But it was a neat theory, and he was in love with it. The

The matter of this English lad, for example: Godolphin, a
the boy had done when they'd finally brought him round to

The Department had been keeping a dossier on old Godolphin
since '84, when the surveying expedition had been all but
had been puzzled that no code was used in the telegram; b

The door opened hesitantly. "I say, Mr. Stencil."

"Yes, Moffit. Do what I told you?"

"They're together. Mine not to reason why, you know."

"Bravo. Give them an hour or so together. After that we l

"And then follow him, eh. Game is afoot, ha, ha."

"Oh, he'll go to Scheissvogel's. We've advised him to kee
think he is."

"And the Gaucho?"

"Give him another hour. Then if he wants to escape, let h

"Chancy, Mr. Stencil."

"Enough, Moffit. Back in the chorus line."

"Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay," said Moffit, soft-shoeing out the

Two cells away there was a loud morra game in progress. C

"She's singing for the tourists," the Gaucho complained b
sing marching songs, which are useful for morale."

Evan stood by the cell door, leaning his forehead against

The Gaucho came over and gripped Evan's shoulder sympath

Evan looked around hopelessly at the small cell, the heav

The Gaucho laughed. "I think they will release me too. I

Evan clenched the bars furiously.

"Stupid! Not only stupid. Deranged. Illiterate. Some bung

"Ideas are so novel to them. Once they get hold of one, h

"If that were all. But someone in the higher echelons had

"They asked me about Vheissu," the Gaucho mused. "What co

"But they don't tell you why. All they give you are myste
And they think I am in on it. And you. Why else, if they

"I hope you didn't believe them. Diplomatic people always

Evan turned slowly to face his companion. "But I do belie
every hundred years erupt into flaming hell, but people g

"You know how a boy is. There comes a time for departure,

"I thought Captain Hugh was mad; I would have signed the
this condition of being just human, which had made Vheiss

The Gaucho did not answer. He walked to the window, stood

"If they let you out," he said,
"in time to see your father, there is also at Scheissvoge

"But they will see your collar missing."

The Gaucho grinned, stripped off his shirt and tossed it

"How do you propose to get out?"

"Simply. When the turnkey comes to let you out, we beat h

"If both of us get away, should I still take the message?"

"Si. I must first go to Via Cavour. I will be at Scheissv

Soon footsteps, jangling keys approached down the corridor
minds," the Gaucho chuckled. Evan turned to him quickly,

"Good luck."

"Put down your bludgeon, Gaucho," the turnkey called in a

"Ah, che fortuna," said the Gaucho mournfully. He went ba

VIII

Around Italian spy circles, the latest joke was about an

The author of this parable was one Ferrante, a drinker of absinthe and destroyer of virginity. He was trying to gro

That evening he was wandering around secret police headquarters he employed as helpers a Negro named Gascoigne who would But English most assuredly not. Which had given rise to h

He descended into the kitchen. Horrible screeching noises

"A thousand pardons, signora," Ferrante said, getting to at her placatingly.

"Ferrante," she croaked abruptly, "this is no time for su

Ferrante was taken aback. Had she been snooping? Or merel

"That is nonsense," she retorted. "The English know somet

"Perhaps."

"Is it not true, then, that the young Gadrulfi has testifi

"Gadrulfi is a florist," said Ferrante impassively, "whom You have got your facts confused."

"More likely you and your fellow spies have got your name

"That is the way it appears in our files."

"You are clever, Ferrante. You trust no one."

He shrugged. "Can I afford to?"

"I suppose not. Not when a barbaric and unknown race, emp

Ferrante stood suddenly breathless. She was paraphrasing

"Having explored the volcanoes of their own region," she
the first to become aware of these tunnels, which lace th

"Aspetti!" Ferrante cried. "You are raving."

"Tell the truth," she said sharply. "Tell me what Vheissu

He was breathing with difficulty. She had guessed or spie
had been added to meager fact, and the censorship of that

"It could stand for Venus, for all I know," he said. "Ple
it had been composed by Palestrina.

Adjoining the prison which Evan had recently vacated, and spying - in that business she saw mostly ugliness, little

She wondered, standing stone-still at the crossroads, where

as glorious testimony to her own skill. One thing she had

If there were, as some doctors of the mind were beginning from and depended on an article of the primitive faith which

At length she heard the prison door open, heard his footsteps

She looked up. His face was indistinct. He peered closer at her. "I

She murmured assent. "And you sang Mozart to me." He did

"A bit of a lark," Evan bumbled. "Didn't mean to embarrass

"You did."

Evan hung his head, sheepish. "But what are you doing out

"Yes," she said quietly. "Waiting for you."

"That's terribly flattering. But if I may say so, you are

"Because you are his son," she said.

He did not, he realized, have to ask for explanation: would
It was as if what he'd said to the Gaucho, back in their

From his slight elevation he noted an ornate ivory comb,
comb for a conversational opening when she spoke.

"How strange tonight, this city. As if something trembled

"Oh, I've felt it. I think to myself: we are not, any of

"Perhaps the only radiance left is in Vheissu."

He looked down at her. "How odd you are," he said. "I al

She pursed her lips. "Do you know how I felt when I spoke

He
smiled. "That would make us brother and sister."

She didn't answer. They turned into Via Porta Rossa. Tour

"Perhaps we are in limbo," he said. "Or like the place we

"Perhaps nowhere in the world."

For that moment at least they seemed to give up external
against by hawkers and sightseers, lost as much perhaps i

He broke it first. "You haven't told me your name."

She told him.

"Victoria," he said. She felt a kind of triumph. It was t

He patted her hand. "Come," he said feeling protective, a

"Of course," she said. They turned left, away from the Ar

The Figli di Machiavelli had taken over for their garriso

"The lion and the fox," came the answer. Borracho unlatch
Tito, who earned his living selling obscene photographs t

"They're marching," he began to babble, "tonight, half a

"What in God's name is this," Borracho growled, "has Ital

"The Consulate. The Consulate of Venezuela. They are to g

"Calm down," Borracho said. "Perhaps the moment which the

Tito saluted, wheeled, ran to the door on the double, unl
gaped. Without a word the Gaucho brought his closed fist

"Idiot," the Gaucho said. "What's happened? Is everyone i

Borracho told him about the army.

The Gaucho rubbed his hands. "Bravissimo. A major action.

"Not much time, commendatore."

"We will be there at midnight. Vada."

"Si, commendatore." Borracho saluted and left, stepping o

The Gaucho took a deep breath, crossed his arms, flung th

Scheissvogel's Biergarten and Rathskeller was a nighttime other touring nations. An Italian caffè (it was conceded)

Old Godolphin and Rafael Mantissa sat out in back in the

"Am

I not your friend?" Signor Mantissa pleaded. "You must te

"Perhaps to my son," said Godolphin.

"I never had a son. But isn't it true that we spend our l
own father, not realizing that it was still as valuable t

The old man shook his head, half-smiling; "It isn't so mu

"Perhaps. It is difficult to understand how an English ex

Godolphin stared at nothing. "I think it is the opposite
in love. I had never penetrated to the heart of any of th

"What did you see?" asked Signor Mantissa, leaning forward

"Nothing," Godolphin whispered. "It was Nothing I saw." S

"Raf, you will be ridden by it longer than I. I haven't m

"The Pole. My friend.
Then why have we not -"

"Seen it in the press. Because I made it that way. They f

Two carabinieri and their girls arose from a table and we

"It was a foolish thing," Godolphin said, "what I did. Th
of winter. They thought I was insane. Possibly I was, by
me. Why? Perhaps for some alien, not-quite-human reason t

Signor Mantissa looked disappointed. "Are you sure. Hugh?

"Does it make any difference?" Godolphin said. "If it wer

Signor Mantissa shrugged helplessly. "And now? Those who

"Think
I will tell. Know I have guessed the meaning of their clu

Evan stood over them. "Father," he said.

"Son." They shook hands. Signor Mantissa yelled for Cesar

"Could you all excuse me for a moment. I must deliver a m

"He is a friend of the Gaucho," Cesare said, coming up be

"You have seen the Gaucho?" asked Signor Mantissa.

"Half an hour ago."

"Where is he?"

"Out at Via Cavour. He is coming here later, he said he h

"Aha!"

Signor Mantissa glanced at his watch. "We haven't much ti

Three tables away Moffit watched, smiling.

XI

That march from Via Cavour was the most splendid the Gau
a few in carriages. Halfway into town the renegades met C

They reached the Consulate at a few minutes to midnight a

The Gaucho caught sight of Cesare and Signor Mantissa, with a cry of "Take charge." Cuernacabron saluted and dived into the mel

"Guard the other one," Signor Mantissa called back to God

"Evan," the girl whispered, moving closer to him. "Will t

He did not hear her eagerness, only her fear. "Don't be a

Old Godolphin had been looking at them, shuffling his feet. "I would - I wish you would come with me." He couldn't loo

"But Papa," he said, "I would be leaving my only true lov

Victoria stood on tiptoe to kiss his neck. "We will meet

The old man turned away from them, trembling, not underst

Evan released Victoria, moved to Godolphin. "Father," he

"My fault," the father said. "My oversight, I dare say, f

Evan let his hand rest splayed on Godolphin's back. Neith

The
old man turned at last. "Time we got round to it."

"We will," Evan said, trying to smile. "After all, here v

The old man did not answer, but burrowed his face against square. From her hair the heads of five crucified also lo

Lugging the tree, Signor Mantissa and Cesare staggered th

Inside the Sala di Lorenzo Monaco, Cesare unsheathed a ra
watched its movement, a slow horror growing in him. In th

What sort of mistress, then, would Venus be? What outlying
of her God, her voice, her dreams? She was already a god

A gaudy dream, a dream of annihilation. Was that what God

"Aspetti," he shouted, leaping forward to grab Cesare's h

"Sei pazzo?" Cesare snarled.

"Guards coming this way," the Gaucho announced from the e

"You have come all this way," Cesare protested, "and now

"Yes."

The Gaucho raised his head, suddenly alert. The rattle of lives," the Gaucho said. "Have you got your lady with you

"No," Cesare said, disgusted. "Not even the damned tree."

They dashed down a corridor smelling of burnt cordite. Si

"I must return to the battle," the Gaucho said, breathless. I think we are apes in a circus, mocking the ways of men.

Signor Mantissa grasped his hand. "Thank you," he said.

The Gaucho shook his head. "Per niente," he muttered, the

Evan looked over to where Victoria was standing enchanted

Moffit, knocked sprawling by a not-so-rotten turnip, saw

"I say,"
said Moffit, "it's Sidney."

"I've been looking all over for you," Stencil said.

"Not a mo too soon. They're getting away."

"Forget it."

"Down that alley. Hurry." He tugged at Stencil's sleeve.

"Why?"

"Don't ask why. It's over."

"But."

"There was just a communique from London. From the Chief."

"Oh, my God."

They edged into a doorway. Stencil pulled out his pipe and

They scurried down a narrow street to the Lungarno.
There, after Cesare had removed two middle-aged ladies and

"Can anyone pilot a barge," Signor Mantissa wondered. "It

"Aye, aye, sir." In a moment they were free of the quay.
they called, in what were already ghosts' voices, "addio."

Cesare waved. "A rivederci." Soon they had disappeared, and

Chapter Eight

In which Rachel gets her yo-yo back, Rooney sings a song,
calls on Bloody Chiclitz

Profane, sweating in April's heat, sat on a bench in the

A weird area it was. For a week now he'd sat patient in a

So far no agency he'd been to had sent him anywhere for a
he'd had enough of wandering out in the suburbs. He wanted
interest in human strangers. Which is better, one would s

Profane sighed. The eyes of New York women do not see the

He'd thought himself into an erection. He covered
it with the Times classified and waited for it to subside.

He happened to look down. His erection had produced in th

He opened his eyes on Space/Time Employment Agency, down
he saw a bum lying across the aisle, diagonal on the seat

Having sunk into self-pity, he nearly missed the Fulton S
the street and ten floors up. The waiting area was crowde

Profane made out his application, dropped it on the recep
the rail. Smiling and waving hello to everyone in her cou

Obstinate, it would not. The back of his neck began to gr

"Profane," she called. Looking at him with a little frown

Oh God, he thought, the loaded chamber. The luck of a sch who by common sense should lose at the game. Russian roul

He sat down quickly. She lit a cigarette and cased the up

He fumbled for a cigarette, nervous. She flicked over a p

And would she ever. Already they were in bed; he could se

Strangely then, the tumescence began to subside, the fles must feel like this, after a short time of lying inert, r

"How about a night watchman," she said at last. Over you?

"Where," he said. She mentioned an address nearby in Maic soon as you find out. Bergomask will tell you right away,

At the door he looked back. Was she blowing a kiss or yaw

Winsome had left work early. When he got back to the apart

There is a curious sea story about Pig Bodine, which Wins
bilges of the radio shack of U.S.S. Scaffold - Pig's ship

One night Task Force 60, made up of two carriers, some ot
'55 and more or less peacetime, captains were routed out

"Message follows." Teletype operators, com officers, lea

"Flash." Yes, yes, they thought: five bells, Flash. Go ah

Pause. Finally the keys started clattering again.

"THE GREEN DOOR. One night Dolores, Veronica, Justine, Sh

For some reason, Pig never got caught. Possibly because h
graduate named Knoop, were in on it and had locked the do

It caught on as a sort of fad. The next night, precedence

But initial sin entails eventual retribution. Later, some
Pig snored away among a litter of special-request chits.

Now on the radio at the moment was a song about Davy Croc
symbols on their heads. Nonsensical legends were being pr

"Born in Durham in '23,

By a pappy who was absentee,

Was took to a lynching at the neighborhood tree,

Whopped him a nigger when he was only three.

[Refrain]: Rooney, Rooney Winsome, king of the decky-dance.

Pretty soon he started to grow,

Everyone knew he'd be a loving beau,

Cause down by the tracks he would frequently
go

To change his luck at a dollar a throw.

Well he hit Winston-Salem with a rebel yell,

Found his self a pretty Southron belle

Was doing fine till her pappy raised hell

When he noticed her belly was beginning to swell.

Luckily the war up and came along,

He joined the army feeling brave and strong,

His patriotism didn't last for long,

They put him in a foxhole where he didn't belong.

He worked him a hustle with his first C.O.,

Got transferred back to a PIO,

Sat out the war in a fancy chateau,

Egging on the troops toward Tokyo.

When the war was over, his fighting done,

He hung up his khakis and his Garand gun

Came along to Noo York to have some fun,

But couldn't find a job till '51.

Started writing copy for MCA

It wasn't any fun but it was steady pay,

Sneaking out of work one lovely day

He met him a dolly called Mafi-yay.

Mafia thought he had a future ahead,

And looked like she knew
how to bounce a bed

Old Rooney must've been sick in the head

Cause pretty soon, they up and they wed.

Now he's got a record company,

A third of the profits plus salary,

A beautiful wife who wants to be free

So she can practice her Theory.

[Refrain] Rooney, Rooney Winsome, king of the decky-dance.'

Pig Bodine had fallen asleep. Mafia was in the next room,

Maybe Rachel would put in a word for him with Paola. He had
him in each frame of his stag-movie fantasies. It was nat

He entered the room as Mafia was bent, stripping off a kn

"Something new," said Winsome. "For variety's sake." One
she wasn't, half-carried, half-tossed her to the bed when

"No," said Winsome, "not that I can think of."

III

Profane returned to the Space/Time agency convinced that

"Wonderful," she said. "He's paying the fee, you don't ov

It was near quitting time. She started straightening thir

But he remembered, leaning against the wall out in the cold, he recalled, like his mother. Maybe all she wanted to do

They rode down in the elevator, crowded together and quiet.

"Hey," said Profane.

"You're broke," she told him.

"I feel like a gigolo." He did. There'd always be some 15

Rachel decided to lodge Profane at Winsome's place and feed

The next night Pig Bodine showed up at Rachel's at supper

"Hey," Pig addressed Profane.

"Buddy," Profane said. They opened beer.

Soon Pig had dragged them down to the V-Note, to hear McCoy. Rachel sat and concentrated on the music, while Pig and B

They talked for a while. Break ended. The quartet drifted

She woke up the next morning, Sunday, mildly hung over. W

"It is a day of rest," she growled. "What the hell."

"Dear father-confessor," he said, looking as if he'd not

"Tell it to Eigenvalue." She stomped to the kitchen, put

What else:

Mafia. Now, this was all deliberate. He had put on the da

Rachel wanted to know, naturally enough, if he'd spoken t

"I think she's been sleeping around, Rachel."

"So. Find out and divorce her."

They drained the coffeepot twice. Rooney drained himself.
this?" he said. "Even small-talk."

"If it helps," she smiled, not believing it for a minute.

"If I am," Rooney told her, "it's all I'm getting."

He walked back to his apartment through Riverside Park, w

Back at the apartment he found Profane talking with Mafia

"You tell me you are half-Jewish and half-Italian," Mafia

Profane

decided not to argue. So all he said was: "It is probably

"Rot," she said, "class. Aristocracy is in the soul. You

I know, Profane thought. I am a descendant of schlemiels,

Mafia had squirmed to a prone position parallel to Profane

In came Pig Bodine and Charisma, singing a drinking song:

"There are sick bars in every town in America,

Where sick people can pass the time o' day.

You can screw on the floor in Baltimore,

Make Freudian scenes in New Orleans,

Talk Zen and Beckett in Keokuk, Iowa.

There's espresso machines in Terre Haute, Indiana

Which is a cultural void if ever a void there be,

But though I've dragged my ass from Boston, Mass.

To the wide Pacific sea,

The Rusty Spoon is still the bar for me,

The Rusty Spoon is the only place for me."

It was like bringing a little bit of that gathering-place
or three members got Profane off in a corner and began to

IV

That night, April 15, David Ben-Gurion warned his country
their private versions of history showed up in action. If

Stencil fell outside the pattern. Civil servant without r
looped trail. Naturally, about drives as intellectualized

It didbring up, however, an interesting note of sexual a

genus and species. To go along assuming that Victoria the

Early in May, Eigenvalue introduced Stencil to Bloody Chi
a simultaneous and psychopathic craving for simple gyrosc
less than ten years later, he had built up an interlocking

Stencil toured one plant out on Long Island. Among instr
Soon the afternoon had gone and Stencil had made an appoi

A week or so later, in one of the secluded side rooms of

Stencil listened attentively. The tale proper and the que

Chapter Nine

Mondaugen's story

I

One May morning in 1922 (meaning nearly winter here in th

picking his nose, waiting for the sun to come up and cont

Originally a native of Leipzig, Mondaugen exhibited at le
this other hemisphere, and enter mirror-time in the South

Mondaugen was here as part of a program having to do with
was ordered to set up his equipment as close to 28 degree

It had disturbed him at first, having to live in what had

The sun rose and van Wijk appeared
in his doorway, like a two-dimensional figure jerked sud

Van Wijk waved a bottle of homemade beer at him. "I know,

"My antennas," Mondaugen cried.

"Your antennas, my Warmbad district," the Boer said. He v

Which, as had been intended, shook Mondaugen. He managed,

"Six men, some women and children, rifles, stock. It isn't

Mondaugen's annoyance had given way all at once to fear;

"They threatened to

rip down your antennas, didn't they."

But he'd done nothing

Van Wijk snorted. "You contributed. You told me you'd lis

Mondaugen admitted he'd been using an audio amplifier and

"When you return to your station," van Wijk cut in, "thos
one word. Just one. An unpleasant word: rebellion."

"Every time a Bondel talks back to you people, it's rebel

"Abraham Morris has joined forces by now with Jacobus Chr

Van Wijk appeared in the doorway. "Now
listen to me, younker, if I were you I would go to Warmba

"What's happened."

"That was the location superintendent at Guruchas. Appare

"The Bondels with Morris took it as a declaration of war.

"No, no," Mondaugen said, "I am something of a coward, yo
there are my antennas."

"You worry about your antennas as if they sprouted from y

"You could have prevented this," Mondaugen cried. "Isn't

Van Wijk exploded in a bitter fit of laughing. "You seem,

"Die lood van die
Goevernement indeed. We are, perhaps, the lead weights of

To this curious soliloquy Kurt Mondaugen flipped a desperate
equipment undisturbed. Working as quickly as he could, he

It was several more
hours to Foppl's. The only incident on route was a flurry

As usual, a party was in progress, a hundred windows blaz

The news alarmed certain of Foppl's neighbors who owned f
the region: strong, easily defended. House and grounds ar

"To hell with them out there. Let them have their war. In

Thus began Foppl's Siege Party. Mondaugen left after two

The day after Mondaugen's arrival, the house and grounds
at the top, and down went the bridges. A watch list was m

A curious crew were thus thrown together. Many, of course

Early on the morning after his arrival, Mondaugen was up

Back

here Mondaugen could also see down into a kind of inner c

But she had seen him. "Come out, come out, gargoyle," she
nearly fell off the roof, grabbed hold of a lightning rod

"My little antennas," he gurgled.

"Come to the roof garden," she invited, and disappeared t

He completed his job of setting up the antennas, then ma

"How pretty he is." The woman, dressed now in jodhpurs an

Mondaugen knew, without having to run to see, that the cr
he'd seen the crimson stain. Neither he nor the woman mov

Her name proved to be Vera Meroving, her companion a Lieu

"Perhaps we even met one Fasching," she said, "masked and

Mondaugen doubted, but had they met: were there any least

As the distance between them gradually diminished Mondaug
its surface. Inside were the delicately-wrought wheels, s

"What was it like outside?"

He told her the little he knew. Her hands had begun to tr

"It could be 1904 again."

Curious: van Wijk had said that. What was 1904 to these p

Two things made Foppl's a fortunate place to be carrying
of scientific endeavor, buffered by a number of empty sto

Second, modest though their demands were, there was an au

Soon, padding down a narrow, sloping corridor, he was bro
around the next corner. Framed for him there were Vera Me

Presently he began to hear music, which grew louder the c

"Love's a lash,

Kisses gall the tongue, harrow
the heart;

Caresses tease

Cankered tissue apart.

Liebchen, come

Be my Hottentot bondsman tonight,

The sjambok's kiss

Is unending delight.

Love, my little slave,

Is color-blind;

For white and black

Are only states of mind.

So at my feet

Nod and genuflect, whimper for me:

Though tears are dried

Their pain is yet to be."

Enchanted, Mondaugen peered round the door jamb and found

"I am Hedwig Vogelsang," she informed him, "and my purpose
and wheeled with her across the room, and out, and through
pinions and worms, all receiving their prime impulse from

When at length he tired, slowed and stopped she'd gone, v

Soon he stumbled into a basement
room where gardening implements were stored. As if the en

"Don't touch him." Foppl stood holding a sjambok or cattl

Andreas moved his head feebly and whispered; "Baas . . ."

"Your people have

defied the Government," Foppl continued, "they've rebelled

As van Wijk had bade him do, Mondaugen remembered to ask
also seemed under compulsion somehow to recreate the Deut

One midnight, Mondaugen stood on a small balcony just und

"I hope I don't disturb you," Godolphin said. Mondaugen s
the only peace there is to this eternal celebration." He

Mondaugen's eyebrows went up. Embarrassed, he began to pi

"Of course. Rather awkward if it were the other, haw-haw.

"And I'd heard of a stout boat in Swakopmund. But of cour

"You sound cheerful. In the face of what must be frequent

"They leave the sting out. Treat the doddering old fool v

"At the Pole."

"Certainly. Now I have to go back, it's that simple. I'm
has for me."

Mondaugen was inclined to agree. "Though I don't plan on

The old sea dog chuckled. "Oh, there will be. You wait. E

Which it occurred to Mondaugen, was as far South as one o

The woman, twice as old as he, exerted a sexual fascinati
efforts to hold it in check, their conspiracy grew.

As if it were a real affair, Lieutenant Weissmann cornered

"You're from Munich," Weissmann established. "Ever been a

"So many capital letters," Mondaugen protested.

"From Munich, and never heard of Hitler," said Weissmann,

"I'm an engineer, you see. Politics isn't my line."

"Someday we'll need you,"

Weissmann told him, "for something or other, I'm sure. Sp

"Politics is a kind of engineering, isn't it. With people

"I don't know," Weissmann said. "Tell me, how long are yo

"No longer than I have to. Six months? it's indefinite."

"If I could put you in the way of something, oh, with a l

"Organizing, you'd call it?"

"Yes, you're sharp. You knew right away, didn't you. Yes.

"The Protectorate? But it's under the League of Nations."

Weissmann threw back his head and began to laugh, and wou
cue, dumped the three balls from their velvet bag and pra

He emerged from the billiard room to hot jazz from somewh

In the dream it was Fasching, the mad German Carnival or
Any windfall - food, firewood, coal - was consumed as qu

It was dark. He was in an old cloth jacket, a stocking ca
thighs exposed to the still-winter wind. He stooped and o

He was in a beer hall. Young, old, students, workmen, gra
blistering the hands that passed it on, till it disintegr

Vera Meroving appeared (why Vera? her black mask covered

At dawn she came in through the stained-glass window to t

"Come and see," she urged him. "In the garden."

"No, no." It

had been a popular form of killing during the Great Rebel
who stayed for only one of them, is reckoned to have done

Foppl had first come to Sudwestafrika as a young Army rec

"Of

course not," said Mondaugen in his nit-picking engineer's

"Oh," Foppl said. "Well. You're busy."

As it happened, Mondaugen was. Though it may have been on
try to break it. His room became littered with tables, ec

He took to roaming the house at odd hours, at loose ends.

"No. Non-military it may be, but a false siege it is not.

Mondaugen

lit a cigarette and peered around the column. She was sit

"Do you remember," she began. But then noticed perhaps th

"I have done believing in siege as anything more than mil

Condescending, she explained that she'd been off in another

It was beyond Godolphin. "I was advising the Russian Fleet
out. And white spotlights, moving over the positions at night

"Lieutenant Weissmann and Herr Foppl have given me my 190

Hardly any time at all passed before he cried, "No! No, I

"Of course you did."

"I hardly remember Vheissu myself."

"I do. I have remembered for us."

"'Have remembered,'" with a sudden canny tilt to one eye.

"If anything gave me my Vheissu it was the time, the Pole
fashionable to say the War did it. Whatever you choose. B

"I'm past forty," smiled Vera Meroving, "and of course I

"They'd go to the Adriatic on holiday," Godolphin said wi

"No," suddenly and only for the moment vicious, "not selling her jewels to suppress t

"Weren't we both in Florence then? While he was writing t

"In Florence . . . we . . ." quizzical, weak.

She leaned forward, as if hinting she'd like to be kissed

Abruptly then occurred one of those ironic reversals in w
logic in their discussion than to a latent virility in th

Godolphin laughed at her. "There's been a war, Fraulein.

"But the need," she protested, "its void. What can fill t

He cocked his head and grinned at her. "What is already f
taken to. It's a pity; and I'm only glad I don't have to

"You're remarkable," was all she'd say; and after brainin

Alone, he said: "We simply grow up. In Florence, at age f

"Once we could flirt and spoon,

Down by the summertime sea.

Your aunt Iphigenia found it terribly odd

To see us stealing a kiss there on the Promenade, oh

You weren't past seventeen,

Parasol-pretty for me;

Ah, could we but return to that season of light,

With our puppy-love soaring like a gay summer kite,

When it wasn't yet time to think of autumn, or night;

Down by the summertime sea."

(Here Eigenvalue made his single interruption: "They spok

Stencil silenced, puffed his pipe and watched the psychoc

"I understand only," Eigenvalue drawled, "that your attit
what we now call simply a heterodont configuration."

Stencil made no answer; Eigenvalue shrugged and let him c

In the evening a roasted veal was set out on a long table

Somehow he'd wandered by Hedwig's room. Her door was open
she called, "don't stand there leering."

"Your little eyes look so antiquated."

"Herr Foppl has ordered all the ladies to dress and make

"Oh, you have a heart then."

"Please, Kurt, I said don't make me cry. Come: you may he

When he lifted the heavy, pale locks from her nape he saw
Together they put up her hair in an elaborate curly bun,

He bent to kiss one shoulder. "No," she moaned, then went

He staggered to the corridor: she'd vanished. Feeling rat

He got as far as a decorative grotto, located in the very
"Upington!" he screamed.

"Ah?" inquired Mondaugen, blinking.

"You're a cool one. Professional traitors are always so c

Mondaugen, still groggy and enveloped in a miasma of colo

"Whom have you been in contact with at Upington?"

"Upington."

"It has to be, it's the nearest large town in the Union.

"I don't know anyone in the Union."

"Careful how you answer, Mondaugen."

It finally came to him that Weissmann was talking about t

Weissmann

avored him with a smile. "You just convicted yourself. T

If you can do any better you're welcome," Mondaugen sighe

"You mean that?" abruptly almost childlike. "You'll let m

"You've obviously seen everything. But it'll put us that

Quite soon he had Weissmann laughing shyly. "Oh. Oh, I se

Struck by an inspiration, Mondaugen whispered, "I'm monit

Weissmann frowned. "That's what I just said."

Mondaugen shrugged. The lieutenant lit a whale-oil lamp a
Mondaugen became numb, the lantern went smash behind him.

"The strand wolf," was all Weissmann could manage.

In his room Mondaugen had brandy, but Weissmann's face re

Mondaugen worked on the code into the early morning, gett

Somewhere out in the house (though he may have dreamed th

Once past the storage rooms, he found the adjoining corri
whitewashed floor he saw a trail of blood-spatters, still

Mondaugen broke into a sprint, jumped neatly over whateve

"I loved the man," he'd said. "He taught us not to fear.
you could safely forget all the rote-lessons you'd had to

"Till we've done it, we're taught that it's evil. Having

Shuffling sounds behind him. MondaugEn turned; it was God

"I beg your pardon."

"It's I, son. Captain Hugh."

Mondaugen came closer, thinking possibly Godolphin's eyes

"Good morning, Captain."

"You don't have to hide any more, son. She told me; I know
his arm above the elbow and smiled bravely. "Son. It's ti

Trying to be gentle, Mondaugen let the sea captain steer

Godolphin had gone vague. "The girl. Your girl. What's-he

A minute passed before Mondaugen remembered enough of God

Godolphin's little head nodded, brushed Mondaugen's arm.

Mondaugen stooped and picked up the old man, who seemed t
and sang:

"Dream tonight of peacock tails,

Diamond fields and spouter whales.

Ills are many, blessings few,

But dreams tonight will shelter you.

Let the vampire's creaking wing

Hide the stars while banshees sing;

Let the ghouls gorge all night long;

Dreams will keep you safe and strong.

Skeletons with poison teeth,

Risen from the world beneath,

Ogre, troll, and loup-garou,

Bloody wraith who looks like you,

Shadow on the window shade,

Harpies in a midnight raid,

Goblins seeking tender prey,

Dreams will chase them all away.

Dreams are like a magic cloak

Woven by the fairy folk,

Covering from top to toe,

Keeping you from winds and woe.

And should the Angel come this night

To fetch your soul away from light,

Cross yourself, and face the wall:

Dreams will help you not at all."

Outside, the strand wolf screamed again. Mondaugen pounded the light, and lay down trembling on the rug to sleep.

III

But his own musical commentary on dreams had not included

". . . so much rot spoken about their inferior kultur-pos from childhood. Under Leutwein's administration the cattl

Foppl. Perhaps.

Except that the shape of Mondaugen s "conspiracy" with Ve

Not unreasonably then, she would also have used Foppl, pe replaced the son, Foppl the siege party's demon, who was

Again one night he heard the Dies Irae, or some organized tissue cut down in its prime. Sjambok, makoss, donkey whi

They took the cadaver off to a ravine to toss it in. One

"He remains in your room, then," she began.

"By choice."

"He has no choice. You'll make him go."

"You'll have to make him go, Fraulein."

"Then bring me to him?" almost importunate. Her eyes, rimmed with a certain dignity no, turn, leave her there and, return to

Having found the sad imitation of a strayed son, Godolphin

Eighteen years ago everyone was in better condition. You were in the breast, and for a week or so it puffed up. In the way tro

Later, when it had got into deep winter, the sun bleached

Most of the time, thank God, you were with your own kind. When a man wants to appear politically moral, he speaks o

His efforts at the code, such as they were, didn't succee

"But we were to collaborate."

"I know what your interest is," Mondaugen said mysteriously.
"I know what 'code' you're after."

"It's part of my job." Putting on his sincere farm-lad face

"Tell her it won't, it didn't work," Mondaugen said.

The lieutenant ground his teeth solicitously. "I can't in

"I am working for you?" Mondaugen screamed. "Scheisse." E

"My God," he said finally, tonelessly; about-faced and le

But when Mondaugen found the first oscillograph roll miss

"He

must have come in when I was asleep." Not even Mondaugen

Afraid he was and, as it turned out, with good reason. For
a very German question: if no one has seen me, then am I

He was given a lovely mare named Firelily: how he adored

He rode her all over the territory. From the coastal dese

For

it was hard to avoid a feeling of impracticality about the
Often they never even saw the natives before they killed

His gums ached, he felt tired and possibly slept more than

"You want fresh vegetables," the sea dog informed him, firmly.

"No. For God's sake," Mondaugen raved, "don't leave the room."

"Try to lie quietly," Godolphin told him. "I can handle the noise."

Mondaugen lunged off the bed, but flaccid muscles betrayed him. Nimble Godolphin vanished, the door swung to. For the first

They'll drain his juices, he thought; caress his bones with

Mondaugen's own father had died not so many years ago, so

Presently, heavy footsteps approached through the outer room,
so craftily Mondaugen wiped his gums once more on the bedclothes.

"Now that the twilight's just beginning,

World, stop

Spinning;

Cuckoo's in his
clock with laryngitis,

So he can't tell us what night tonight is.

No one among the other dancers has

Any

Answers, just

You, I, the night

And a little black sjambok . . ."

When Weissmann came back into the mirror he was carrying

One could as well have been a stonemason. It dawned
on you slowly, but the conclusion was irresistible: you w

The first clear instance of it he could remember came one
rearranging the line so the weight of the extra chain wou

It was a glorious day, December and hot, a bird somewhere
hardly so elegant: they could only boast a homogeneous st

The trek hadn't been under way more than an hour before
sing or chant; that perhaps could have been borne. But the

But this Hottentot would not keep silent. He was only lim
until through some stupid misjudgment, Fleische's sjambok

Their reflexes are fast, they're like animals. Before the

Fleische managed to roll away. The two of them got the ke

But as they did this thing - and Fleische said later that
perhaps like what the black was feeling as he gave up the

This time it wasn't like that. Things seemed all at once
slid into alignment, assumed a set symmetry, a dancelike

It had only to do with the destroyer
and the destroyed, and the act which united them, and it

When through some levitation he again found himself on to

"Good evening,
poor Kurt." She rode the Bondel as far as the bed and dis

Mondaugen attempted a greeting, found himself too weak to

"Where is Godolphin," he cried.

"She has him."

"O God . . ."

Sometimes

impotent, sometimes aroused despite his lassitude, Monday

"You hate me," her lip quivering unnaturally as a forced

"But I have to recuperate."

In through the window came Weissmann with his hair combed

Later Foppl appeared in the door with Vera Meroving, held

"I know what you want,

Princess of coquettes:

Deviations, fantasies and secret amulets.

Only try to go

Further than you've gone

If you never want to live to see another dawn.

Seventeen is cruel,

Yet at forty-two,

Purgatory fires burn no livelier than you.

So, come away
from him,

Take my hand instead,

Let the dead get to the task of burying their dead;

Through that hidden door again,

Bravo for '04 again; I'm a

Deutschesudwestafrikaner in love . . ."

Once mustered out, those who stayed either drifted west to

Just as its own loose sand was licked away by the cold to

so diffracted was it by the sea fog. A luminous gray tend

He'd been deceived, that was his first thought: it wasn't
than the interior could survive without them. Having legi

There were compensations, but they were not the luxuries
more nearly equal.

After three years of ripe, Southern indulgence, to come u

The barren islets off Luderitzbucht were natural concentr
and slick with cloud, lay drawn together to pool what mar
an unbalance, a general sensation of error that could onl

And so, as you moved among them, you were forced to look
if it was this particular girl the beast waited far.

As a civilian Schachtmeister drawing government pay, this

It was problematical who among the females had the better
carts to pull loads of silt dredged from the floor of the
Only once could he remember anything like that happening,

But if physical labor exhausted those who lived inside th
curious ideas. One sergeant, too far down the chain of co

Himself, he could have been happy in that new corporative

He found her first a mile out in the Atlantic, on a break
were building of sleek dark rocks that the women carried

She looked at the chit, then at him. Clouds moved across
birds wheeled in the sky. The breakwater stretched behind

Here was another like the woman pinned under the rail, and

He asked her name, she answered Sarah, eyes never having
whatever it had meant, was over.

That night she didn't come. Next morning he caught her on

He didn't eat supper. He waited alone in his house near t
He walked out without a coat into low clouds and made his

The next morning she appeared as usual. He chose two stro

And that night, long after he'd turned in, she came to hi

Yet how long could he have had her to himself? During the
cooked, cleaned, comforted, been the closest thing to a w

He came home to find her drooling, her eyes drained for g
it all in, he unlocked her shackles and it was as if like

The next day her body was washed up on the beach. She had
array of picaresque acts he was to recall and celebrate i

year after Jacob Marengo died, on that terrible coast, where
deceptively unpolitical and apparently minor enemies, ene

IV

"Kurt, why do you never kiss me any more?"

"How long have I been sleeping," he wanted to know. Heavy

"It's night."

He grew aware of an absence in the room: located this eve
gums no longer felt as sore or spongy. The purple spots o

Hedwig giggled. "They made you look like a hyena:"

The mirror had nothing encouraging to show him. He batte

"Don't squint, darling." She had a toe pointed toward the
dozen visitations from the sferics, this being the only l

Surrounding the besieged Bondels
in a ragged noose, were whites, closing, mostly volunteer

"Bombs," Foppl commented. "That's what woke us up." Some of their wine goblets; lips blackened with yesterday's wine,

Over the horizon, from the direction of the Union, came t

The planes looked as if they would come no nearer, only h
and begun to glow red, and seemed to ribbon the sky its e

Now the planes could be heard: a snarling, intermittent s
the roof. How the watchers cheered. The cordon moved rapi

Had a new phase of the siege party begun with that dusk's
voyeurism had been determined purely by events seen, and

No one saw any more battles. From time to time, a body of

Mondaugen remained up in his turret, working diligently a
put on him one Fasching: to become surrounded by decadenc

One night he was awakened by a disheveled Weissmann, who

DIGEWOELDTIMSTEALALENSWTASNDEURFUALRLIKST

"So," he yawned.

"It's your code. I've broken it. See: I remove every thir

"Well, then," Mondaugen snarled. "And who the hell told y

"The remainder of the message," Weissmann continued, "now

"The world is all that the case is,"

Mondaugen said. "I've heard that somewhere before." A smi

"I swear," Weissmann protested, hurt.

Later on, finding the turret oppressive, Mondaugen exited
of Down by the Summertime Sea.

Mondaugen this time withdrew, preferring at last neither

"Why are you leaving the party so early,

Just when it was getting good?

Were the crowds and the laughter just a little too tame,

Did

the girl you had your eye on go and forfeit the game?

O tell me

Where is there music any gayer than ours, and tell me

Where are wine and ladies in such ample supply?

If you know a better party in the Southwest Protectorate,

Tell us and we'll drop on by

(Right after this one)

Tell us and we'll drop on by."

He reached the other side, adjusted the knapsack and began

Two miles further on, at a fork in the road, he met a Bon
dead." He let Mondaugen ride behind him. At that point Mo

Chapter Ten

In which various sets of young people get together

I

McClintic Sphere, whose horn man was soloing, stood by the thought could be better) and half watching the customers

This was last set and it'd been a bad week for Sphere. So

The horn wanted to finish off: he'd been tired all week a

The bums stood outside like a receiving line. Spring had in the lot, got in and took off uptown. He needed to relax

Half an hour later he was in Harlem, in a friendly rooming

"She's up there," Matilda said, with a smile for everybody

The girl was sitting on the bed, smoking and reading a we who couldn't really afford dollar beers at the V-Note but

"Do you ever dig what I'm trying to say," he wondered.

"On the horn I don't," she answered, honest enough, "a gi

"Sorry," he said. After a while, "This is a good way to r

"Stay tonight?"

"Sure."

Slab and Esther, uncomfortable with each other, stood in some time ago, to painting in a frenzy these morning-past

The subject of Cheese Danish # 35 occupied only a small a

"This," explained Slab in answer to her question, "is my the universal symbol I have decided will replace the Cross

"Why can't he fly away?" Esther said.

"He
is too stupid. He used to know how to fly once, but he's

"I detect allegory in all this," she said.

"No," said Slab. "That is on the same intellectual level

She'd wandered to the bed. "No," he almost yelled.

"Slab, it's so bad. It's a physical pain, here." She drew

"I'm not getting any either," said Slab. "I can't help it

"Aren't I your friend?"

"No," said Slab.

"What can I do to show you -"

"Go," said Slab, "is what you can do. And let me sleep. I

Roony and Rachel sat at the bar of a neighborhood tavern
the corner, an Irishman and a Hungarian were yelling at e

"Where does she go at night," Rooney wondered.

"Paola is a strange girl," said Rachel. "You learn after

"Maybe seeing Pig."

"No. Pig Bodine lives at the V-Note and the Rusty Spoon.

It's killing me, Winsome wanted to say. He didn't. Lately
He ordered another boilermaker.

"Roony, you drink too much," she said. "I worry about you

"Nag, nag, nag." He smiled.

Next evening, Profane was sitting in the guardroom at Ant

Its skin was cellulose acetate butyrate, a plastic transp
made of the same clear plastic as the body shell. These c

Anthroresearch Associates was a subsidiary of Yoyodyne. I
at five in the afternoon, as Profane was going on and Ber

Three times a night he had to make the rounds of the lab
kinship with SHOCK, which was the first inanimate schlemi

SHOCK was a marvelous manikin. It had the same build as S plastic lungs provided the necessary suction and bubbling

SHOCK was thus entirely lifelike in every way. It scared

It was time to make another round. The building was empty. No experiments tonight. On the way back to the guardroom

"What's it like," he said.

Better than you have it.

"Wha."

Wha yourself. Me and SHOCK are what you and everybody wil

"There are other ways besides fallout and road accidents.

But those are most likely. If somebody else doesn't do it

"You don't even have a soul. How can you talk."

Since when did you ever have one? What are you doing, get

"It's one way," said Profane. "All one way."

Mazel tov. (Maybe the hint of a smile?)

Somehow Profane had difficulty getting back in the plot of the story. After a while he got up and went over to SHROUD. "What do you mean?"

Am I dead? If I am, then that's what I mean.

"If you aren't, then what are you?"

Nearly what you are. None of you have very far to go.

"I don't understand."

So I see. But you're not alone. That's a comfort, isn't it?

III

The next weekend there was a party at Raoul, Slab and Mel's.

At one in the morning Rooney and Pig started a fight.

"Son of a bitch," Rooney yelled. "You keep your hands off my girl."

"His wife," Esther informed Slab. The Crew had withdrawn
brawlers believe the movie saloon fight is the only accep

"I don't hate the Jewish people," Mafia was explaining, "

All at once Profane got a marvelous idea. She wanted to k

She beat him to it: her hand reached for his belt buckle

"No," he said, having changed his mind. Needing a zipper

"I need a man," already half
out of the skirt, "fashioned for Heroic Love. I've wanted

"Heroic Love's ass," said Profane. "You're married."

Charisma was having nightmares in the next room. He start

"Here," she said, lower half denuded, "here on the rug."

Profane got up and rooted around in the icebox for beer.

"Here yourself." He set a can of beer on her soft abdomen

"A woman wants to feel like a woman," breathing hard, "is

With spiderwebs woven
of yo-yo string: a net or trap. Profane could think of no

"Nothing heroic about a schlemiel," Profane told her. What

"Why," he wondered, "does something like sex have to be s

"What are you," she snarled, "a latent homosexual? You af

"No, I'm not queer." How could you say: sometimes women r

Charisma came in, two beady eyes peering through burnhole

"It is something less than heaven

To be quoted Thesis 1.7

Every
time I make an advance;

If the world is all that the case is

That's a pretty discouraging basis

On which to pursue

Any sort of romance.

I've got a proposition for you;

Logical, positive and brief.

And at least it could serve as a kind of comic relief:

[Refrain]

Let P equal me,

With my heart in command;

Let Q equal you

With Tractatus in hand;

And R could stand for a lifetime of love,

Filled with music to fondle and purr to.

We'll define love as anything lovely you'd care to infer

On the right, put that bright,

Hypothetical case;

On the left, our uncleft,

Parenthetical chase.

And that horseshoe there in the middle

Could be lucky; we've nothing to lose,

If in these parentheses

We just mind our little P's

And Q's.

If P [Mafia sang in reply] thinks of me

As a girl hard to make,

Then Q wishes you

Would go jump in the lake.

For R is a meaningless
concept,

Having nothing to do with pleasure:

I prefer the hard and tangible things I can measure.

Man, you chase in the face

Of impossible odds;

I'm a lass in the class

Of unbossable broads.

If you'll promise no more sticky phrases,

Half a mo while I kick off my shoes.

There are birds, there are bees,

And to hell with all your P's

And Q's."

By the time Profane finished his beer, the blanket covered

Twenty days before the Dog Star moved into conjunction with Mars, which killed forty-three. 14 July a MATS plane crashed at Monticello, Utah, killed fifteen and a

These were the mass deaths. There were also the attendant

IV

McClintic Sphere had been reading fakebooks all afternoon

The girl didn't answer. She'd been nervous the past couple of weeks. "What is wrong, baby?"

"You been seeing him? A little girl should do that. You could

"He lives in another city," and she wouldn't say any more

Tonight he said, "Look, you need the fare? You go see him."

"McClintic," she said, "what business does a whore have going out at night?"

"You are. You are with me, Ruby. You know it; we aren't going to leave."

"Whore lives in one place and stays there. Like some little girl."

"You haven't been thinking about that."

"Maybe." She wouldn't look at him.

"Matilda likes
you. You crazy?"

"What else is there? Either the street or all cooped up."

"Where does he live. South Africa?"

"Maybe."

"Oh Christ."

Now, McClintic Sphere told himself, nobody goes and falls in love with a whore.

It had been going on now for at least a couple of weeks.
straight, and there wasn't any jazzing going on there, so

It was moving into deep summer time in Nueva York, the wo
had the same look: too cool. Too unemotional when he said

This word flip was weird. Every recording date of McClint
a flip-flop, which when it was turned on could be one of

"And that," the man said, "can be yes or no, or one or ze

"Crazy," said McClintic, having lost him back there somep

McClintic, no lyricist, had made up nonsense words to go

"Gwine cross de Jordan

Ecclesiastically:

Flop, flip, once I was hip,

Flip, flop, now you're on top,

Set-REset, why are we BEset

With crazy and cool in the same molecule

. . ."

"What are you thinking about," said the girl Ruby.

"Flipping," said McClintic.

"You'll never flip."

"Not me," McClintic said, "whole lot of people."

After a while he said, not really to her, "Ruby, what hap

"Maybe that's it," the girl said, after a while. "Maybe y

"But you take a whole bunch of people flip at the same ti

"Flip, flop," she said, "get the mop."

"You're just like a little kid."

"McClintic," she said. "I am. I worry about you. I worry
he's flipped."

"Why don't you go see him." The same argument again. Toni

"You are beautiful," Schoenmaker was saying.

"Shale, am I."

"Perhaps not as you are. But as I see you."

She sat up. "It can't keep going the way it's been."

"Come back."

"No, Shale, my nerves can't take this -"

"Come back."

"It's getting so I can't look at Rachel, or Slab -"

"Come back." At last she lay again beside him. "Pelvic bo

"Please."

"Esther, I want to give. I want to do things for you. If

She became aware of a clock ticking on the table next to
to run to the street, naked if need be.

"Come," he said, "half an hour in the next room. So simple."

She began to cry.

"What would it be next?" she said a few moments later. "I don't know."

He rolled over, exasperated. "How do you tell a woman," he said, "that you don't love her?"

"You don't love me." She was up, struggling clumsily into a dress.

"You'll be back," he said, still watching the floor.

"I won't," through the light wool of her sweater. But of course she would.

After she left, there was only the ticking of the clock, and the sound of the door.

While at Anthroresearch

Profane listened with half an ear to the coffee percolating in the kitchen.

Remember, Profane, how it is on Route 14, south, outside the city.

"I wish you would. Look at you, masquerading like a human being."

Of course. Like a human being. Now remember, right after the war.

"Hitler did that. He was crazy."

Hitler, Eichmann, Mengele. Fifteen years ago. Has it occu

"What,
for Christ sake?"

While Slab lounged meticulous about his canvas, Cheese Da

And Charisma, Fu and Pig Bodine came rollicking out of a

And Rachel and Rooney sat on a bench in Sheridan Square, t
had risen and something curious too had happened; as if e

And Stencil sat dour and undrunk, in the Rusty Spoon, whi
tongues and backs of teeth stained purple by this morning

"Wha," said the Catatonic Expressionist.

"Melancholy," said Stencil.

And Mafia Winsome, mateless, stood undressed before the m

And who knew where Paola was?

In the past few days Esther had become more and more impo

"It isn't me you love," she kept saying. "You want to cha

In return he could only argue a kind of Platonism at her. with her, didn't every girl want a man to love the soul,

"Who are you," she yelled back, "to say what my soul look

In answer to which Schoenmaker rolled over and stared at

Eigenvalue the soul-dentist had even given Schoenmaker co people."

But then, he did. He gave cut rates on cleaning, drilling

But they produced nothing but talk, and at that not very

So much for Art. What of Thought? The Crew had developed little more than proper nouns, literary allusions, critic

"Mathematically, boy," he told himself, "if nobody else o

It scared Eigenvalue, sometimes. He would go in back and

McClintic, back for a weekend from Lenox, found August in
off on the horizon, twitchless, sure, waiting for night;

He'd come back to see Ruby. Faithful, he'd sent her postcard

For some reason one night he'd dashed lengthwise across the

Out in front of a seafood place on the main and only drag
rum, 150 proof - and a pineapple, sat on the hood. At 80

At the party McClintic's eye was taken by a little girl in

"Give me back my eye," said McClintic.

"I haven't got your eye."

"Later." He was one of those who can be infected by the crowd

Bass was outside, in the tree, with a girl. "You got eyes

"Have you heard, baby did you know:

There ain't no dope in Lenox . . ."

Fireflies surrounded McClintic, inquisitive.
Somewhere you could hear waves crashing. The party inside

Along came Harvey Fazzo, a piano player. "Eunice wants to

"No," McClintic said. There was movement in the tree over

"You got a wife in New York?" Harvey asked, sympathetic.

"Something like that."

Not long after, along came Eunice. "I have a bottle of gi

"You will have to do better," said McClintic.

He hadn't brought any horn. He let them have their inevitable
ends of the instrument of what exactly is there, this qu

Time was McClintic wouldn't have thought twice. Wife in M

She was there when he reached Matilda's; but only just. E

Ruby started bawling the minute he showed in the doorway.

"Don't worry," she finally said. "I made a bet with myself

Started unpacking the suitcase then,
tears still falling promiscuous on her silk, rayon, cotton

"Stupid," McClintic yelled. "God, that's stupid:" He had

"What is there to talk about," she said a little later, t

When had it become a matter of having her or losing her?

Charisma and Fu crashed into the room, drunk and singing

"Oh God," Profane said into the phone: "the roaring boys

Through an open door, on a bed there, an itinerant raced

"Oh man,

I want some young blood,

Drink it, gargle it, use it for a mouthwash.

Hey, young blood, what's happening tonight . . .

Werewolf season: August."

Rachel kissed the mouthpiece on her end. How could you ki

The dog staggered away into the kitchen and fell with a c

"I find one," Fu screamed from the kitchen. "One bucket,

"Fill it wiv beer," from Charisma, still a Cockney.

"He look pretty sick."

"Beer is the best thing for him. Hair of the dog." Charis

"It's hot," Rachel said.

"It will be cool. Rachel -" But their timing was off: his
heat lightning walked sneaky-Pete over Jersey.

Soon Murray Sable stopped snoring, the girl fell quiet: e

"Have you been talking," he said.

"No"

"All right. But what goes on underground. Do we, I wonder

"There are things under the city," she admitted.

Alligators, daft priests, bums in subways. He thought of

"I have to sleep. I have the second shift. Call me at mid

"Of course."

"I mean I broke the electric alarm clock here."

"Schlemiel. They hate
you."

"They've declared war on me," said Profane.

Wars begin in August. In the temperate zone and twentieth

Hung up, the phone now looked evil, as if it schemed in s

"Hey, he going to puke?"

The dog puked, loud and horrible. Winsome came charging i

"I broke your alarm clock," Profane said into the mattress

"What, what," Winsome was saying. Next to Murray Sable a
casa, you guys. Where is it you've been. "

Charisma, head hanging, shuffled around in a greenish pool

"Out rollicking," said Fu. The dog began to scream at him

Back in August 1956, rollicking was the Whole Sick Crew's
line running up and downtown, because this is the way a y

Slab was king; after a memorable party a year ago at Raoul

Stencil thought it all nonsense.

"Get in there at rush hour," said Slab. "There are nine m

Stencil took this advice one evening after five, came out
sound except for the racketing of the subway, echoes in t

Trauma: possibly only remembering his last shock under gr

"You ought to see this." Handing him a small packet of ty

Confessions, the title. Confessions of Fausto Maijstral.

"I ought to go back," she said.

"Stencil has stayed off Malta." As if she'd asked him to

"Read," she said, "and see."

"His father died in Valletta."

"Is that all?"

Was that all? Did she really intend to go? Oh, God. Did h

Phone rang, mercifully. It was Slab, who was holding a party over the weekend. "Of course," she said,

Chapter Eleven

Confessions of Fausto Maijstral

It takes, unhappily, no more than a desk and writing supply

Let me describe the room. The room measures 17 by 11 by 7

One enters from the WSW, by a door midway in a long wall
the door and turning clockwise one sees a portable wood s

That is the room. To say the mattress was begged from the

The room is in
a building which had nine such rooms before the war. Now

Fausto himself may be defined in only three ways. As a re

Why? Why use the room as introduction to an apologia? Bec

In the University, before the war, before I had married y
mother, I felt as do many young men a sure wind of Greatr

Time of course has showed the question up in all its youn
is any more than a romance - half a fiction - in which al

Before 1938, then, came Fausto Maijstral the First. A you

Maijstral the Second arrived with you, child, and with th
Elena Xemxi your mother - and you - would never have come

Fausto Maijstral III was born on the Day of the 13 Raids.

His successor, Fausto IV, inherited a physically and spir
passed a certain level in his slow return to consciousness

We have now reached an interregnum. Stagnant; the only th

Now memory is a traitor: gilding, altering. The word is,
as truth than to say "Maratt is a sour-mouthed University

Already you see: the "is" - unconsciously we've drifted i

'How wondrous is this St. Giles Fair called history! Her

The date is of course 3 September 1939: the mixing of met
crowding of detail, rhetoric-for-its-own-sake only a way

Could we have been so much in the midst of life? With suc

"Britain and Crown, we join thy swelling guard

To drive the brute invader from our Strand.

For God His own shall rout the evil-starred

And God light peace's lamps with His dear hand . . ."

"God His own"; that brings a smile. Shakespeare. Shakespeare
on Eliot's poem:

"Because I do

Because I do not hope

Because I do not hope to survive

Injustice from the Palace, death from the air.

Because I do,

Only do,

I continue . . ."

We were most fond, I believe, of "The Hollow Men." And we
the hot-jazz band, the gallant conversation. The prewar U

But Fausto I was as bastardised as the others. In the mid

'Our poets write of nothing now but the rain of bombs fro

I think our education in the English school and University

Can I explain "love"? Tell her

my love for her is the same and part of my love for the B

Are we only animals then. Still one with the troglodytes

But we are torn, our grand "Generation of '37." To be men
of all the greys and shadows of love?

Perhaps British colonialism has produced a new sort of be

These thoughts are from the darker side of my mind - mohh

What monsters. You, child, what sort of monster are you?
retreat, God alone knows. There's no indication in the jo

'I write this during a night raid, down in the abandoned

And then, for no apparent reason, this:

'O Malta of the

Knights of St. John! History's serpent is one; what matte
or catacomb's darkness is ours, by fate or historical wri

He must have written the latter part at home, after the r

First mention of Elena Xemxi comes from Fausto I, shortly

Oh, he was "in love": no doubt. But his own ideas on the
and glorification, of motherhood. We already know for exa

'The dog days have ended, the maijstral has ceased to blo

Myself: what am I if not a wind, my very name a hissing o

For Elena - tonight! O, Elena Xemxi: small as the she-goat
in communion the St. John's-bread I have cherished like a

He did not propose marriage; but confessed his love. Ther

'Has she lost her faith? I've heard she has been out with
from him and eighteen years of purity - gone!'

Etc., etc. Dnubietna, as Fausto must have known even in t

'Sunday there was rain, leaving me with memories. Rain se

Ultimately their quarrel took in a third party. In typica

'She came to me today, out of smoke, rain, silence.
Wearing black, nearly invisible. Sobbing plausibly enough

She's to have a child. Dnubietna's, came my first thought

So much for our plan. Maratt and Dnubietna will be disapp

So much for their plan. We will return to this matter of

From a distraught Elena then, Fausto learned of his "riva

'No one knows his name or his parish. There is only super
were shadowed by a wide-brimmed hat; all she could see we

Now it was none of your mysterious "corruption." Priests

"It was near the church - our church. By a long low wall

"Have you confessed?' he asked.

"I looked at his eyes. I thought at first he was drunk, c

"Come then.' We entered the confessional. At the time I
tell him things I have never told Father Avalanche. I dic

Now sin for Elena Xemxi had been heretofore as natural a

'How could she marry anyone? She was fit, said the Bad Priest. Father A. is unreceptive to such talk. All my Elena saw was the dis-

She stayed away from me and from Father A.'s confessional

These, poor child, are the sad events surrounding your girl

Later, after the marriage, after your birth, well into the reign
of Fausto II when the bombs were falling, the relationship

'German bombers over today: ME-109's. No more need to look

Moving towards that island-wide sense of communion. And a
shoulder, as it were: in retreat.

'Not a night since Italy declared war have we known raid

But isn't it a way of glorifying God? Hard-labour surely.
But as if somewhere once without our knowledge we'd been

No sleep, little food; but no complaints. Are we not, Mal

Retreat, then, into religious abstraction. Retreat also i
commented elsewhere on the poetry which came out of Malta

'Here towards midnight in a lull between raids, watching
Purgatory. Perhaps it comes only from living on an island

Or in a more poignant vein:

'Spring has come. Perhaps there are sulla blossoms in the

None of us has the right to ask that any more, Paola. Only

The other great image is of something I can only call slow
the truth had precedence over his engineer's politics. He

We all came back eventually. Maratt in a way which in any
emplacements, being shown how to operate the guns. They t

Fausto II's return was most violent of all. He dropped av

But all shared this sensitivity to decadence, of a slow f

"I remember

A sad tango on the last night of the old world

A girl who peeped from between the palms

At the Phoenicia Hotel

Maria, alma de mi corazon,

Before the crucible

And the slag heap,

Before the sudden craters

And the cancerous blooming of displaced
earth.

Before the carrion birds came sweeping from the sky;

Before that cicada,

These locusts,

This empty street.

Oh we were full of lyrical lines like "At the Phoenicia R

"Truth" I mean, in the sense of attainable accuracy. No m

Now there is your grandmother, child, who also comes into
II, for instance, was that sort of confused Maltese youth

Early in the war we get passages like this:

'Malta is a noun feminine and proper. Italians have indeed

Womb of rock. What subterranean confessions we wandered in
of the circumstances surrounding his birth. It had been m

Did he feel trapped? Having escaped lucky from one womb,

Again the classic response: retreat. Again into his damna

'Oh, we've become accustomed to these things. My own mother
done. I refuse to dwell on death because I know well enou

But perhaps more on this island because we've become, aft

Seven raids today; so far. One "plot" of nearly a hundred

It's the rock they come back to. Fausto II managed to wor

'Don't touch them, these walls. They carry the explosions
for miles. The rock hears everything, and brings it to bo

The vibration is impossible to talk about. Felt sound. Bu

Stand free, Maijstral . . .'

The passage above comes towards the Siege's end. The phrase
chiromancy to reduce those days to simple passage through

"Motes of rock's dust

Caught among corpses of carob trees;

Atoms of iron

Swirl above the dead forge

On that cormorant side of the moon."

Maratt wrote:

"We knew they were only puppets

And the music from a gramophone:

Knew the gathered silk would fade,

Ball-fringe fray,

Plush contract the mange;

Knew, or suspected, that children do grow up;

Would begin to shuffle after the first hundred years

Of the performance; yawn toward afternoon,

Begin to see the peeling paint on Judy's cheek,

Detect implausibility in the palsied stick

And self-deception in the villain's laugh.

But dear Christ, whose slim jewelled hand was it

Flicked from the wings so unexpected,

Holding the lighted wax taper

To send up all our poor but precious tinder

In flame of terrible colours?

Who was she who gently laughed, "Good
night, "

Among the hoarse screaming of aged children?"

From the quick to the inanimate. The great "movement" of

Seeing his mother after a period of months away:

'Time has touched her. I found myself wondering: did she
to be made drunk.'

This last from an old folk tale. The king wants a palace

"There must have been," Fausto explains, "millennia ago,

Decadence, decadence. What is it? Only a clear movement t

Is it only because
Malta is a matriarchal island that Fausto felt so strongly

"Mothers are closer than anyone to accident. They are mos

'Their babies always seem to come by happenstance; a rand

So

it moves us on toward the question of Fausto's "understan

I know of machines that are more complex than people. If

More and more alien from himself, Fausto II began to dete
in the world around him.

'Now the winter's gregale brings in bombers from the north

Somewhere, perhaps behind a hill - some shelter - farmers

Apparently he took at this time to shambling about in the
his job. Nor, at first, for very long.

'Pile of brick, grave-shaped. Green beret lying nearby. F

Early sun still low on the sea. Blinding. Long blinding t
down and everything can be heard.'

For a matter of months, little more than "impressions." A
the 20th Century, at whose far end or turning - we hope -

It is the acid test. To populate, or not to populate. Gho

It was not hostility, Paola, this leaving you and Elena a
the first bomb of 8 June 1940. The old Chinese artificers

'How beautiful is blackout in Valletta. Before tonight's

Is it night only that wraps Valletta? Or is it a human emotion
tension or malaise to this silence; it's cool, secure; the

Thank God you're safe, Elena, in our other, subterranean

I go from you love not because I must. We men are not a man
any sea's verge. There is no leaving you, Elena; not in the

But in dream there are two worlds: the street, and under

Poor Fausto. The "vulgar song" was sung to a march called

"Hitler

Has only one left ball,

Goering

Has two but they are small;

Himmler

Has something similar,

But Goebbels

Has no balls

At all . . ."

Proving perhaps that virility on Malta did not depend on
"tenacity," "perseverance," etc. More than metaphor, it is

Manhood on Malta thus became increasingly defined in terms

Poets have been at this for centuries. It is the
only useful purpose they do serve in society: and if ever

It is the "role" of the poet, this 20th Century. To lie.

"If I told the truth

You would not believe me.

If I said: no fellow soul

Drops death from the air, no conscious plot

Drove us underground you would laugh

As if I had twitched the wax mouth

Of my tragic mask into a smile -

A smile to you; to me the truth behind

The catenary: locus of the transcendental:

$$y = a/2 \left(e^{(x/a)} + e^{(-x/a)} \right).$$

Fausto ran across the engineer-poet one afternoon in the
had been sheared in two but which half was left, priest's

Dnubietna indicated the church with his head. "Have you b

"To Mass: no." They hadn't met for a month. But no need t

"Come on. We'll get drunk. How are Elena and your kid?"

"Well."

"Maratt's is pregnant again. Don't you miss the bachelor
random the pavement's patterning. The sun had almost achi

"Peace," said Fausto. "Quaint word." They skipped around

"Sylvana," Dnubietna sang, "in your red petticoat/ Come b

"You should get married," Fausto said, mournful: "It's no

"Poetry and engineering have nothing to do with domestic

"We haven't," Fausto remembered, "had a good argument for

In here. They went down a flight of steps which led under
in a corner. Dnubietna vanished for a moment behind the k

"I ought to be asleep," Fausto said. "I work tonight."

"Remorse of a uxorious half-man," Dnubietna snarled, pour

"No use," Dnubietna said. "I've never had to pay for mine

"That is long gone," he said quietly.

"Once a priest always a priest," Dnubietna retorted. "Com
Consecrate it. It's Sunday and you haven't been to Mass."

Overhead, the Bofors began an intermittent and deafening

"Stealing my wine," the owner cried. He stumbled to the w

"It isn't consecrated. Maijstral the apostate is at fault

"Now God and I have an agreement," Fausto began as if to

When had that come to him? In what street: at what point
only taken four glasses of wine.

"How," one of the girls asked seriously, "how can there b

Dnubietna looked at his friend's face, saw no answer fort

"That's the hell of it, love. Drink your wine."

"No," screamed Tifkira, propped against the other wall, w

"Waste," Dnubietna laughed above the noise. "Don't talk o

Above, the all-clear sounded. Soon after there was noise
at the door. Dnubietna opened and in rollicked the artill

"Away, away!" shouted Dnubietna. Tifkira, giving up his o

"Go to, caitiff," Fausto cried, saluted again and fell over the
artilleryman. A brawl developed. Bombs were falling over
and down it went, slow as a balloon, the black smoke of it

Dnubietna hung over him, haggard, one eye beginning to swell

"It was hardly heroic," Fausto wrote. "We were both drunk

Post

hoc. And only part of the over-all "relationship." This is

All else in his life having gone underground; having acquired
agreements with God would have to change too. For at least

The child - you - grew healthier, more active. By '42 your
agility your role demanded, to escape subjugation. But all

Your mother and Fausto were away from you most of the time

Was Fausto believing too much: was
the Communion all sham to compensate for some failure as

But the Siege created different burdens and it was impossible

Paola: my

child, Elena's child but most of all Malta's, you were on

The children got about Valletta by their private routes,

'The tide must be turning. Only one raid today, that in t
to explore the Dockyard country with Maratt's boy and som

Above in the street the sun was shining. We ascended to t
unaware. She began to talk, adolescent girl talk, Maltese
hair caught the sun in its viscous net, sun-freckles danc

How we came to that garden or park I can never tell. All

We found a café, there was wine from the last convoy - ra
too. Hair blew in her eyes. For the first time in a year

In the early afternoon the proprietor came out to sit wit

"English," he said. "Yes I knew the moment I saw you. Eng

Half a dozen children came running round the corner: boys
girls in shifts tagging behind, but ours was not one. The

Forenoon for sea, afternoon for the city. Poor shattered
hear them behind a broken wall: or only a whispering of b

Fausto, were they calling? Elena? And was our child one o

Sad is a foolish word. Light is not sad: or should not be

Until at length - late afternoon - we arrived at a tiny park
in the heart of the city. At one end a band pavilion creased

It was there we awoke, there the children closed in on us

Cold. And then the sun met its cloud, and other clouds were
meet at the centre in a great windspout to bear up the fire

She shivered, held to me for a moment, then abruptly seated

O God, it was the same stupidity to be gone through again
not expect; the bad faith of dreams that send surprise sky

To a park we'd never find again.

We had been using, it seemed, nothing but Valletta to fill

"I am cold." In Maltese: and she did not move closer. The

The more I studied her face - dark hair blowing, foreshadowing
afternoon - the more anxious I became. I wanted to protest

Were there in her the same memories of azaleas, or any sense
was but can never be again!

Palm leaves abraded together, shredding one another to green

Her nails, broken from burying the dead, had been digging children.

My own nails fastened in reply and we became twinned, sym

"Missierna li-inti fis-smewwiet, jitqaddes ismek . . ." S

"Elena."

Her eyes returned to me. "I love you," moving on the grass
old age in 1939 and is now disintegrating quietly under t

Looking past her eyes I saw all white leaves. They had tu

Lost them. Or they had lost us.

"O," she breathed, "O look," releasing me as I released h

There had been nothing. Whether children, maddened leaves
were not real, there are no epiphanies on Malta this seas

I will limit the inevitable annotating to this request. C

The passage is important not so much for this apparent co
of antisubmarine warfare in the Mediterranean had develop

They also knew about the Bad Priest. There is a certain f
as noted. The Germans to be sure were pure evil and the A

A wheel, this diagram: Fortune's wheel. Spin as it might,
the sea's horizon - so sensuous, so "visual" a race are w

Thus they assigned the Bad Priest no opposite number: nei

It wasn't an organized affair. These recording angels nev

What was there about this priest to put him Outside; a ra
the traitor in the ally. There was little wishful thinkin

The children, being poets in a vacuum, adept at metaphor,
a similar infection to any of God's representatives the p

Reports of him were confused. Fausto would hear - through
to find strength in - and be like - the rock of their isl

The children were not, of course, having any. Knowing ful
of Fausto and Elena's walk - the stalking only intensifie

Intensified too - beginning, one suspects, the same day -

Until one evening Elena told the rest of her meeting with

'Our words became more and more agitated, higher in pitch told me . . .'" Then realizing what she'd said, silence. S

"Told you." I shook her until she spoke. I would have kil

"The Bad Priest," finally, "told me not to have the child

And as she had begun to pray in the park had then apparen

I would never be telling you this had you been brought up

The day after Elena's revelation, the Luftwaffe came in t

Word got to me at Ta Kali in the afternoon, during a lull face. I do remember sliding the shovel into a pile of dir

The next I knew I was in the street, in a part of the cit

"Is he dead," one asked. Others were picking already at t

"Speak to us, Father," they called, mocking. "What is you

"Funny hat," giggled a little girl. She

reached out and tugged off the hat. A long coil of white

"It's a lady," said the girl.

"Ladies can't be priests," replied a boy scornfully. He b

"That's Jesus," cried a tall boy. Tattooed on the bare so

Two children had been busy at the victim's feet, unlacing

"Please," the priest said suddenly.

"He's alive."

"She's alive, stupid."

"Please what, Father."

"Sister.

May sisters dress up as priests, sister?"

"Please lift this beam," said the sister/priest.

"Look, look," came cries at the woman's feet. They held u

"If you can't lift the beam," the woman said (with perhaps

"Ah." From the other end. Up came one of the slippers and

"She comes apart."

The woman did not seem to notice. Perhaps she could not look
while the children removed her robes and the shirt; and then

The nude body was surprisingly young. The skin healthy-looking

Other children crowded round her head. One pried her jaws

But she could not even keep them closed. For the children

I wondered if the disassembly
of the Bad Priest might not go on, and on, into evening.

I went down into the cellar to kneel by her.

"Are you alive."

At the first bomb-bursts, she moaned.

"I will pray for you." Night was coming in.

She began
to cry. Tearless, half-nasal; more a curious succession of

I gave her what I remembered of the sacrament of Extreme

I did not hear only what I wanted to hear in these sounds
You will say I had forgotten my understanding with God in

At the time I only knew that a dying human must be prepar

Now touching her lips my fingers recoiled and I returned
knowing.

But soon the cold of the wind - shared now with what had

I returned to Ta Kali, on foot. My shovel was still where

Of Fausto III's return to life, little can be said. It ha

And sketches of an azalea blossom, a carob tree.

There remained two unanswered questions. If he had truly

And why did he not stop the children: or lift the beam?

In

answer to the first, one can only suggest that he was now

The second has caused his successor to write this confession

May He be closer to you.

Valletta: 27 August 1956

Stencil let the last thin scribbled sheet flutter to bare

"An Englishman; a mysterious being named Stencil."

Valletta. As if Paola's silence since - God, eight months

Stencil would have liked to go on believing the death and
(couldn't he?), and continue on in calm weather. He could

Was there nothing for it but Valletta?

Chapter Twelve

In which things are not so amusing

I

The party had begun late, with a core of only a dozen Sid

There hung therefore about Raoul, Slab and Melvin's pad a
as if the sand-sculptures, unfinished canvases, thousands

People would arrive, come the late hours. Raoul, Slab and

Winsome wasn't there when the party began, and didn't show
tapes of McClintic Sphere's group in the parlor while she

"If you ever tried to create," she yelled, "instead of li

"Who creates," Winsome said. "Your editor, publisher? Wit

"Anywhere you are, old sweet, is nowhere." Winsome gave i

He headed downtown and after a while had wandered by the

"Roan."

"Man, I need a change of luck, no racial slur intended."

"Get a divorce." McClintic appeared in a foul mood. "Roan"

"Why not. Out to the boondocks. Green hills. Well people."

"Come on. There is a little girl I have to get out of this"

It took them a while. They drank beer till sunset and then

"Ha, ha," replied Winsome. They continued uptown along the

Not long after, they were arguing like undergraduates over
of conservatism which neighborhood bars possess, and bars

They arrived at Matilda's well past midnight. The old laund

Crash, shrieks, deep-chested laughter from topside. Matilda

"Sylvia, Ruby's friend, is busy tonight," McClintic said.

Winsome was charming. "You young folks just take it easy,

Which cheered McClintic up. There being a certain straine

More noise from upstairs, louder this time. "McClintic,"

"I must go play bouncer," he told Rooney. "Back in five."

Which left only Rooney and Ruby in the parlor.

"I know a girl I can take along," said he, "I suppose, he

Ruby fiddled with the catches on her overnight bag. "Your

"My wife," angry all at once, "is a fucking Fascist, I th

"But if you brought along -"

"All I want to do is go now somewhere out of town, away f

"I'm not that young," she whispered. "Please Rooney, be ea

"Girl, if it isn't Lenox it will be someplace. Further ea
Beach except for too many other slobs like themselves alr

"Stay home."

"No. If only to see how bad Lenox is."

"Baby, baby," she sang soft, absent: "Have you heard,/ Di

"How did you do it."

"Burnt cork, she told him. "Like a minstrel show."

"No," he started across the room away from her. "You didn't

"I have
read books," said Paola, "and listen, Rooney, nobody knows

"I'll never tell, Paola." Then McClintic was back. "You t

"Rach," beamed McClintic. "Good show." Paola looked upset

"I think us four, out in the country -" his words were fo

"Maybe I should drive," McClintic said. It would give him

"You drive," Winsome agreed, weary. God, let her
be there. All the way down to 112th (and McClintic gunned

She wasn't there. The door was open, noteless. She usually

Only her slip tossed awry on the bed. He picked it up, bl

"Where is Esther?" She sounded out of breath.

"You wear nice lingerie," Winsome said.

"Thank you. She hasn't come in?"

"Beware of girls with black underwear."

"Roony, not now. She has really gone and got her ass in a

"Come with me to Lenox, Massachusetts."

Patient sigh.

"There's no note. No nothing."

"Would you look anyway. I'm in the subway."

"Come with me to Lenox [Roony sang],

It's
August in Nueva York Ciudad;

You've told so many good men nix;

Please don't put me down with a dark, "see you Dad" . . .

Refrain [beguine tempo]:

Come out where the wind is cool and the streets are color

Though the ghosts of a million Puritans pace in our phony

I still get an erection when I hear the reed section of t

Come and leave this Bohemia, life's really dreamy away fr

Lenox is grand, are you digging me, Rachel,

Broadening a's by the width of an h'll

Be something we've never tried . . .

Up in the country of Alden and Walden,

Country to glow sentimental and bald in

With you by my side,

How can it go wrong?

Hey, Rachel [snap, snap-on one and three]: you coming along?

She'd hung up halfway through. Winsome sat by the phone,

II

Esther had indeed got her ass in a sling. Her emotional aches
had found her earlier that afternoon crying down in the laundry

"Wha," Rachel said. Esther only bawled louder.

"Girl," gently. "Tell Rach."

"Get off my back." So they chased each other around the w

"Look, I want to help you, is all." Esther had got tangled

She hadn't been swabbing five minutes when Pig Bodine stu

"Here," she said. "You want a swab? I got your swab." She mop. Pig retreated.

"What's wrong with Esther. I wrapped into her on the way

"Slab," Rachel figured. Slab was on the phone after half

"I'll let you know if she shows."

"But Slab -"

"Wha," said Slab.

Wha. Oh, well. She hung up.

Pig was sitting in the transom. Automatically she turned

"What's wrong with Esther," she said, for something to sa

"I asked you that," said Pig. "I bet she's knocked up."

"You would." Rachel had a headache. She headed for the ba

Fever was touching them all.

Pig, evil-minded Pig, inferred right for once. Esther showed
Wrong: dull hair, puffy face, looking heavier already in

Five minutes and she had Slab railing. He stood before Ch

"Don't tell me. Schoenmaker won't give you a dime. I know

That shut her up. Kindly Slab was of the shock-treatment

"Look," he grabbed a pencil. "It is no time of year to go

"It's murder."

"You've turned R. C. Good show. For some reason it always
Decadence."

"You know what I am," she whispered.

"We'll leave that go. I wish I did." He stopped a minute

"We."

"The Whole Sick Crew. You can do it inside a week, down t

"No."

So they talked metaphysics while the afternoon waned. Nei

"How can you say there's a soul there. How can you tell v

"It's murdering your own child, is what it is."

"Child, schmild. A complex
protein molecule, is all."

"I guess on the rare occasions you bathe you wouldn't min

"All right -" he was mad - "show me the difference."

After that it ceased being logical and phony and became e

As the sun went dawn she broke out of a point-by-point co

"Go ahead," Slab said, "it will help the texture." He was
closed . . . I am against usury." He quoted to the phone

"How come," he wondered, "all you phone operators talk th

"I'll think of something," he said. "Stick by Slab, babe."

So Slab sat thinking and Esther waved the paper ball at t
Raoul and Melvin and the Crew to arrive for the party; wh

Rachel, out looking for Esther, didn't arrive at the part

Melvin was holding forth on his guitar, in an improvised
the Republican administration and Westbrook Pegler.

While Melvin sang Raoul provided Rachel with a kind of ma

It seemed earlier Slab had waited till the room was jamme

"Esther here is pregnant," he announced, "and needs 300 k

Surprisingly it came to \$295 and some change. Slab with a
Aires, from which there is no extradition.

If Esther objected verbally to the proceedings, no recor

"Dear God," said Rachel. She had never seen so many red f

"I need a car," she told Raoul.

"Wheels," Raoul screamed.

"Four wheels for Rach." But the Crew's generosity had been

It was only at that point, early in the morning, that Rach

"So," she said. All it was was no wheels on Profane, the
a duty you could rightfully avoid with none of fancy's Fe

Strange the places these things can happen in. Stranger t

III

Profane arrived at Winsome's to find Mafia wearing only t

"Idlewild?" he said. "Maybe we can borrow Rooney's car. Th

"I can," Rachel said, "stand by."

Profane with a rueful
look back at the buoyant Mafia and her friends, moseyed o

"No car," he said, "we're screwed."

"Oh dear." She told him why they had to get to Idlewild.

"I don't see why you're so excited. She wants to get her

What Rachel should have said then was "You callous son of

"I don't know if it's murder or not," she said. "Nor care

For a second Profane thought she was talking
about herself. There came this impulse to get away. She w

Because Esther is weak, Esther is a victim. She will come

"Don't, Rachel. Esther, wha. Are you in love with her, yo

"I am."

"Close your mouth," she told him. "What is your name, Pi

"Them," chopfallen. "Sure, but."

"I mean I love Esther like you love the dispossessed, the
she's felt it, feeling always this own breed of half-asse

"Slab and you were -" kicking a tire - "horizontal once."

"OK." Quiet. "It is myself, what I could slide back into,

Who was she talking about? Profane'd had all night to reh

She held her hair up, eyes gone all rainy; came off the f

"Slab and I rotated our 90 degrees because we were incom

Thus the maverick daughter of Stuyvesant Owlglass perched

Why that last? Only a general desire to find somebody for
of the TV screen? What made her hold any promise of being

You ask too many questions, he told himself. Stop asking,

Only that the nipples which came to make a warm diamond w

Rachel now only wanted to hold him, feel the top of his b

McClintic came in and found them like that, holding toget

Rachel grasped

Everything outside as Paola climbed from the Buick. The t

"Profane, Profane," she laughed while the Buick growled t

IV

Winsome came awake from a dream of defenestration, wonder

He moved to the window, opened, straddled, listened. Girl

"Little teen-age goddess

Don't tell me no,

into
the park tonight

We're going to go,

Let me be

Your teen-age Romeo . . ."

Dedicated to the duck's-ass heads and bursting straight s

Why not go down there? Heat rises. On the areaway's jagged

"Listen friends," Winsome said, "there is a word for all

"Fergus Mixolydian the Irish Armenian Jew takes money from

"Esther Harvitz pays to get the body she was born with all
her. Esther sees nothing wrong either.

"Raoul the television writer can produce drama devious enough

"Slab the painter, whose eyes are open, has technical skills

"Melvin the folk-singer has no talent. Ironically he does

"Mafia Winsome is smart enough to create a world but too

"And on it goes. Anybody who continues to live in a suburban

So

speaking Winsome straightened his tie and prepared to defend

"I say," said Pig Bodine, who'd been out in the kitchen for

"I have heard that one before," said Winsome, and jumped.

"Now look," said Pig. A drunk, urinating below in the cou

"How about letting go," Winsome said after a while. "Aren

Pig admitted they were. "Did I ever tell you," Pig said, story about the coke sacker, the cork soaker and the sock

Winsome started to laugh and with a mighty heave, Pig bro

"No fair," said Winsome who had knocked the wind out of E

The rock 'n' roll enthusiast across the court had turned

So they chased each other up down and around the fire esc
So little happens in New York. Police came charging into

Finally Pig had chased Winsome down to the first landing,

"You still want to jump," Pig said.

"Yes," said Winsome.

"Go ahead," said Pig.

Winsome went down in a swan dive, trying to land on his h

Pig, suddenly realizing that he had been AWOL for eight months, were so stupid they'd never know the difference.

V

At Idlewild was a fat three-year-old who waited to bounce

For such wee hours the airport was mobbed. After having E

"Some guardian angels we are."

"I checked on Pan American and all of them," Profane said

Loudspeaker announced the flight, DC-3 waited across the
Rican baby's friends had come armed with maracas, claves,

"There she is," Rachel yelled. Esther came scooting around

"Oof," said Slab.

"What the hell's the idea, lout." He had hold of one arm.

"Let her go," Slab said. "She wants to."

"You've slammed her around," yelled Rachel. "You trying to

One way or another the Whole Sick
Crew was giving the cops a busy night. Whistles started b

Why not? It was August and cops do not like Puerto Ricans

Profane meanwhile was trying to keep from being clobbered

He finally broke clear of a small knot of wellwishers and

"Benito." The sad pout, sexy as ever.

"God, what else."

She was going
back to San Juan. Of the months between the gang bang and

"Fina, Fina, don't go." Like photographs in your wallet,

"Angel and Geronimo are here." She looked around vaguely.

"They want me to go," she told him, on her way again. He

Finally Fina turned, dry-eyed. "Remember the night in the

"Your ass," he said, "they would have got you sooner or l

"I did it," he said after a while. "It was me." Schlemiel
Rachel now for a dependent, plus whatever would happen wi

He started back for Rachel. The riot was breaking up. Beh

VI

Patrolman Jones and Officer Ten Eyck, disdaining the elev

"Never know what Bellevue is going to turn up," said Jone

He and his sidekick were faithful viewers of the TV progr

"Talked to a doctor there," said Ten Eyck. "Young
fella named Gottschalk. Winsome had a lot to say."

"We'll see, Al."

Before the door, Jones and Ten Eyck waited politely for t

"Oboy, oboy," said a reporter.

The cops knocked. "Come in, come in," called many juiced

"It's the police, ma'am."

"I hate fuzz," somebody snarled. Ten Eyck kicked in the d

"Too bad," the photographer said, "we can't print that on

"All right, ma'am."

"Would you like to play," hysterical.

The cop smiled, tolerantly. "We've talked to your husband

"We'd better go," said the other cop.

"Guess

Al is right, ma'am." Flash attachment lit up the room fro

Ten Eyck flapped a warrant. "All you folks are under arre

"What charge," people started yelling.

Ten Eyck's timing was good. He waited a few heartbeats. "

Maybe the only peace undisturbed that night was McClintic

She talked to him straight and McClintic kept cool. While
it: keep cool, but care. He might have known, if he'd use

"Sure," he said later, as they headed into the Berkshires

"Keep cool but care," he said. Somebody had run over a sk

"You know, don't you," she began, "that I have to -"

"Go back home,
sure. But the week's not over yet. Be easy, girl."

"I can't. Can I ever?"

"We'll stay away from musicians," was all he said. Did he

"Flop, flip," he sang to the trees of Massachusetts. "On

Chapter Thirteen

In which the yo-yo string is revealed as a state of mind

I

The passage to Malta took place in late September, over a

A few of the Crew had come to give Profane, Paola and Ste
of the country or in the hospital. Rachel had stayed away

He was here by accident. While weeks back, off on the fri

He'd forgotten about the inanimate world and any law of r

It didn't take Them long. Only a few nights later Profane
to work. When his eyes finally did come open, he knew fro

Well, he got his feet in the wrong shoes, cut himself sha
the sprinkler system and a couple of CO2 cylinders kicked

"Technicians," Bergomask snorted, "are not paid to wake u

Soon as it had all come through to Profane he shrugged. "

Bon voyage.

"What is that supposed to mean."

We'll see.

"So long, old buddy."

Keep cool. Keep cool but care. It's a watchword, Profane,

"I'll bet under that cynical butyrate hide is a slob. A s

There's nothing under
here. Who are we kidding?

The last words he ever had with SHROUD. Back at 112th Str

"Back to pounding the pavements, lad." She was trying to

"Fine for you," he said. "You've been solvent all your li

"Solvent enough to keep us going till me and Space/Time B

Fina had tried to shove him along the same path. Had it b

"Maybe I don't want to get a job. Maybe I'd rather be a b

She edged over to make room for him, having now those ine
dangerous. You have to con each other a little, Profane.

No: he couldn't let it go. "Let me warn you, is all. That

She made believe she was snoring.

"All right, you know I am a schlemiel. You talk two-way.

"Can't there be a time for that later," she asked meekly.

"No," he leaned over her, "babe, I am not showing you any
are like that."

She turned to him, moving her legs apart: "Hush . . ."

"Can't you see," growing excited though it was now the la
come . . ." So he talked, all the way through, till both

"You have to grow up," she finally said. "That's all: my

He was snoring, for real.

"Dear, how pompous I'm getting. Good night. . ." And she

Next day, rolling out of bed to get dressed, she continued
"Subway," he said, like the hunchback of Notre Dame yelling

"How would you like to be a salesman. Electric shavers for

"Nothing inanimate," he managed to say. "Slave girls, may

Next day, hung over, he yo-yoed on the Staten Island ferry
took them till mid-afternoon. They dug a traffic light for

They came rollicking in late. Rachel was gone.

Out came Paola though, sleepy-eyed, benightedgowned. Pig be

"Right," Pig muttered, "right you are." And glaring at the

"Wha." He looked into the bedroom. Pig had managed to get

"Help?" Profane puzzled. "Rape?"

"Get this pig off of me," Paola yelled.

"Pig, hey. Get off."

"I want to get laid," protested Pig.

"Off," said Profane.

"Up
thine," snarled Pig, "with turpentine."

"Nope." So saying, Profane grabbed the big collar on Pig's

"You are strangling me, hey," said Pig after a while.

"True," said Profane. "But I saved your life once, remember

Which was the case. Back in the Scaffold days, Pig had lost

Pig and his friend Hiroshima the electronics technician had
on the beach with radio tubes. ET's on a destroyer like the

One night Knoop had OOD watch. All an OOD usually does is
ship's office when Knoop like a Siamese boxer fetched him

So only a few nights after that Pig was understandably ne

"Request permission to go ashore, sir, hey," said Pig.

"Permission granted. What is in the AWOL bag."

"In the AWOL bag."

"That one, yes."

"What is in it." Pig pondered.

"Change of skivvies," suggested Knoop, "douche kit, magazine to read, duty laundry for Mom to wash -"

"Now that you mention it, Mr. Knoop -"

"Radio tubes, also."

"Wha."

"Open the bag."

"I would like, I think," said Pig, "maybe to just dash in

Grinning horribly, Knoop made a sudden leap in the air and

"Aha," said Knoop.

Pig came up for captain's mast a week later and got restr offenders. This troupe included Baby Face Falange, the ma

The captain, having seen this element of the crew at ever member of the Captain's (so to speak) Own Men, got off wi

Groomsman was the agent in Pig's near-fatal involvement w

Well, it was Panky Pig went for, Hanky being Groomsman's end up in bed with Hanky. Next morning he pretended to've

Things cruised along all idyllic; spring and summer brou Groomsman yelled down to Pig, "is the only thing that get

"Enough," said Pig. "What about our Club." This was the E

"One thing," Groomsman said, "that Knoop cannot stand is

They discussed ways of exposing Knoop to water, short of

Saturday Knoop had the duty.

At sundown the Navy has this tradition called Evening Col

Knoop had the first dog watch, 4 to 6 P.M., as OOD. Groom

Meanwhile Pig was lying on top of the pilot house, a pile

"Now on deck," said Groomsman. From over the way came the
note of Taps. A few tin cans down the line, jumping the c

The third rubber missed completely, going over the side.
the water-filled rubber from his hat. He started calmly u

They ended up drenched, exhausted and swearing mutual fea

The reconciliation came as a surprise to Pig, who'd expecte
Pig, "what do I do?" To his rescue came Hiroshima, ET3.

"Didn't anybody ever tell you," said this worthy, "about

"Wha," said Pig.

"Stand in front of the radar antenna," said Hiroshima, "w

"Indeed," said Pig. Indeed. Hiroshima showed him a book w

"I am scared of heights?" said Pig.

"It is the only way out," Hiroshima told him. "What you c

Already tottering, Pig made his way topside and prepared Profane. "Good afternoon, Pig." My old buddy, thought Pig

Hiroshima appeared below. "Yo, Pig," he yelled. Pig made

"What are you doing in this neck of the woods," Profane s

"Oh, just out for a stroll," said Pig. "I see you are pai

"Right," said Profane, "deck gray." They examined at leng

Hiroshima and Surd impatient, started yelling. "Well," sa

"Be careful walking around on that platform," Profane sai
up there. I figure on sneaking it off over the 01 deck."

At the top he latched his nose over the platform like Kil

"How remarkable," said Pig out loud, "it smells like hamb

"What are you going to do," said Profane, tossing him a p

Pig made a noose on one end and headed up the ladder agai
to stay as much as he could out of any line-of-sight with

"Amazing," Profane said. "How did you do it?"

"Someday," Pig said, "I will have to tell you about the b

"Anything you want," Pig said then, "just ask, buddy. I h

"OK," Profane said a few years later, standing by Paola's

"A code is a code," Pig choked. Off he got, and fled sadl

When he was gone, Paola reached out for Profane, drew him

"No," said Profane, "I'm always saying no, but no."

"You have been gone so
long. So long since our bus ride:"

"Who says I'm back."

"Rachel?" She held his head, nothing but maternal.

"There is her, yes, but . . ."

She waited.

"Anyway I say it is nasty. But I'm not looking for any de

"You have them," she whispered.

No, he thought, she's out of her head. Not me. Not a sch

"Then why did you make Pig go away?"

He thought about that one for a few weeks.

II

All things gathered to farewell.

One afternoon, close to the time Profane was to embark fo

Around two corners and up the stairs, past apartments of
in business in a small way, past the Venusbergs whose fat

Standing before his old door he knocked, though knowing f
ice bucket.

No. his mother wasn't telepathic, she wasn't expecting Pr

He stayed in the kitchen an hour, while night came along,

They would know he'd been by.

Profane, whose nights were now free, decided he could afford to join the ranks of college kids are fleeing the city, the labor market was r

"Call it a vacation," said Profane. But how do you swing

Before anyone knew it there was Profane, full-fledged Cre

"Rachel," running in a week later, "I smoked pot."

"Get out of here."

"Wha."

"You are turning into a phony," said Rachel.

"You're not interested in what it's like?"

"I have smoked pot. It is a stupid business, like masturb

"It was only once. Only for the experience."

"Once I will say it, is all: that Crew does not live, it
itself and doesn't mean it. Time magazine takes it serious

"It's fun."

"And you are becoming less of a man."

He was still high, too high to argue. Off he rollicked, i

Rachel locked herself in the bathroom with a portable rac

So near one in the morning she was at the Spoon with her

"Benny," she said, "I'm sorry." And later:

"You don't have to try not to hurt me. Only come home, wi

"You don't even have to be a man. Only pretend to love me

None of which made Profane feel any better. But it didn't

One night at the Forked Yew, he and Stencil got juiced. "

"I wish I was leaving the country."

Young Stencil, old Machiavel. Soon he had Profane talking

"I don't know what Paola wants. You know her better. Do y

An embarrassing question for Stencil. He dodged:

"Aren't you two - how shall one say."

"No," Profane said. "No, no."

But Stencil was there again, next evening. "Truth of it i

"Don't talk," said Profane. "Drink."

Hours later they were both out of their heads. "You would
wondered.

"I have been there once. Why should I want to go back."

"But didn't Valletta - somehow - get to you? Make you fee

"I went down to the Gut and got drunk like everybody else

Which eased Stencil. He was scared to death of Valletta.

Shame, said his conscience. Old Sidney went in there with

And look what he got, thought Stencil, a little wry, a li

On the offensive: "Where do you belong, Profane?"

"Wherever I am."

"Deracinated. Which of them is not. Which of this Crew co

"I could not care less about Valletta." But hadn't there
buildings, buff-colored rubble, excitement of Kingsway? W

"I have always wanted to be buried at sea," said Profane.

Had Stencil seen the coupling in that associative train h

Until now. They decided to rollick off to a party on Jeff

Next day was Saturday. Early morning found Stencil rushin

The third passage, meanwhile, was horribly hung over. His

"Why do you go to the Spoon, Benny."

"Why not?"

She edged up on one elbow. "That's the first time you've

"You break your cherry on something every day."

Without thinking: "What about love? When are you going to

In reply

Profane fell out of bed, crawled to the bathroom and hung

She came up behind him, hair all down and straggly for the

"Get off my back," he said.

Still holding on: "So. Only smoked pot once and already h

"It's me talking. Off."

She moved away. "How off is off, Ben." Things were quiet

"On women," she said, "on what you think love is: take, t

He started brushing his teeth fiercely. In the mirror as
of leprous-colored foam, out of his mouth and down both s

"You want to go," she yelled, "go then."

He said something but around the toothbrush and through t

"You are scared of love and all that means is somebody el

Profane made gurgling noises in the sink: drinking out of

"People can change. Couldn't you make the effort?" She wa

"I don't change. Schlemiels don't change."

"Oh, that makes me sick. Can't you stop feeling sorry for
clumsy soul and amplified it into a Universal Principle."

"What about you and that MG."

"What does that have to do with any -"

"You know what I always thought? That you were an access

She looked upset. He pushed it.

"I only started to think about being a schlemiel, about a

"Showing how much you know about girls."

He started scratching his head, sending wide flakes of da

"Slab

was my first. None of those tweed jockstraps at Schlozha

"No," he said his hair all in clumps, fingernails gone ye

"You're not a schlemiel. You're nobody special. Everybody

He stood, pear-shaped, bags under the eyes, all forlorn.

"It can't be. Not for me, nor Paola."

"Where does she -"

"Anywhere you go there'll always be a woman for Benny. Le
She stomped around the room. "All right. We're all hooker

"If you think me and Paola -"

"You and anybody. Until that thing doesn't work any more.

She was on the bed. "Come on baby," she said, too close t

Absurdly he thought of Hiroshima the electronics technician

Bad boys rape our young girls behind victory garden walls

Could any of their resistances be measured in ohms? Someone
Maybe her name would be Violet. Any problems with her, you

He climbed on anyway.

That night at the Spoon, things were louder than usual, of

Near closing time, Stencil approached Profane, who'd been

"Stencil heard you and Rachel are having difficulties."

"Don't start."

"Paola told him."

"Rachel told her. Fine. Buy me a beer."

"Paola loves you, Profane."

"You think that impresses me? What is your act, ace?" You

with the Whole Sick Crew.

"Time for what," Stencil mused. "More words, more beer. A

"Indeed," said Profane. "That's unusual. I never heard of

"Come. Walk."

"I can't help you."

"Be an ear. It's all he needs."

Outside, walking up Hudson Street: "Stencil doesn't want

"Why?" said Profane.

"Why not?" said Stencil. "His giving you any clear reason

"Stencil's
father mentioned her in his journals: this was near the t

"But he stayed off Malta. He had pieces of thread: clues.

"Not so. Because: all along the first thread, from a young
tide which brought us Soviet Russia. Those were symptoms,

They'd turned into 14th Street and were walking east. Mor

"Not even as if she were any cause, any agent. She was on

"He is a hunter."

"You are expecting to find this chick in Malta?" Profane

"How does Stencil know," Stencil yelled. "How does he know

"That again."

"He is afraid. Because if she went there to wait out one
started but whose etiology was also her own, a war which

"You think there'll be a war."

"Perhaps. You've been reading the newspapers." Profane's

"If he must go to Malta, it can't be only with Paola. He

"That could be anybody. You said the Crew was at home any

"It's you she loves. Why not you."

"Why not."

"You are not of the Crew, Profane. You have stayed out
of that machine. All August."

"No. No, there was Rachel."

"You stayed out of it." And a sly smile. Profane looked a

So they went up Third Avenue, drowned in the Street's gre

"There was no difference," he caroled, causing two stroll

"She stole an airplane: an old Spad, the kind young Godol
of a glass eye in the shape of a clock: 'as if I'd been f

"Disguise is one of her attributes. In Mallorca she spent

"Rimbaud," suggested one of the bums.

"Did she know Rimbaud as a child? Drift up-country at age

"Who knows. Stencil would rather depend on the imperfect

"Stencil," Profane announced, "you are juiced."

True. Autumn, coming on, was cold enough to've sobered Pr

V.
in Spain, V. on Crete: V. crippled in Corfu, a partisan i

It went on like this, all the way up into the 70's, this that he was on the verge of a major farewell. If it hadn't

V. by this time was a remarkably scattered concept.

"Stencil's going to Malta like a nervous groom to matrimony

"Wha. Box of candy, flowers, ha, ha."

"Stencil knows just the thing," said Stencil. They were h

"Stay here in the street,"
Stencil said. "He won't be but a minute." And vanished in

"Come on up. You have to help."

"I have to - You are out of your head."

Impatient: "Come up. Before the police get back."

Profane stood outside for a minute, counting floors. Nine

"Can you pick a lock," Stencil asked. Profane laughed.

"Fine. You will have to go in a window, then."

Stencil rummaged in the broom closet and came up with a l

"Me," said Profane. They started up to the roof.

"This is important." Stencil was pleading. "Suppose you were enemies with someone. But had to see him, her. W

They reached a point on the roof directly above Eigenvalu

Profane looked down into the street. "You," with exaggera

They looped the line round Profane's middle. He being so

"How is it," Stencil said after a while.

"Except for those three cops down there, who are looking

The
line jerked.

"Ha, ha," said Profane. "Made you look." Not that his mood

The center of gravity calculation, it turned out, was way

"Dear God," muttered Stencil. He tugged at the line, impatiently.

"Hey," he called after a while.

Stencil said what.

"Pull me back up. Hurry." Wheezing, feeling his middle ache.

"What's
wrong."

"You forgot to tell me what it was I was supposed to do with it."

"- and you lock it when you go out," they recited together.

Profane flipped a salute. "Carry on." Stencil began lowering the antenna.

"Stencil, hey. The window won't open."

Stencil took a few half-hitches round the antenna.

"Break it," he gritted. All at once another police car, siren blaring.

Profane was horizontal again. He'd covered his head with his hands.

"What are you doing," said Stencil.

"Hiding," said
Profane. "How about a little torque." Stencil turned the

"Now the other way."

He got the window open, climbed inside and unlocked for S

"What the hell."

Profane looked around. "One pane broken is crude," he exp

Back on the street, scot-free, they followed the bums' wa

In the wilds of that skinny rectangle they found a rock n
stream. Stencil sat down and produced the teeth.

"The booty," he announced.

"It's yours. What do I need with more teeth." Especially

"Decent of you, Profane. Helping Stencil like that."

"Yeah," Profane agreed.

Part of a moon was out. The teeth, lying on the sloping r

All manner of life moved in the dying shrubbery around th

"Is your name Neil?" inquired a male voice.

"Yes."

"I saw your note. In the men's room of the Port Authority

Oho, thought Profane. That had cop written all over it.

"With the picture of your sexual organ. Actual size."

"There is one thing," said Neil, "that I like better than

There was then a soft clobbering
sound followed by the plainclothesman's crash into the un

"What day is it," somebody asked. "Say, what day is it?"

Out there something had happened, probably atmospheric. E

A band of juvenile delinquents marched by, singing.

"Look at the moon," one of them called.

A used contraceptive came floating along the stream. A girl

Somewhere else a traveling clock chimed seven. "It is Tuesday

But about the night-park, near-deserted and cold, was some
heat is turned off suddenly and forever. The moon shivers

"How quiet," said Stencil.

"Quiet. It's like the shuttle at 5 p.m."

"No. Nothing at all is happening in here."

"So what year is it."

"It is 1913," said Stencil.

"Why not," said Profane.

Chapter Fourteen

V. in love

I

The clock inside the Gare du Nord read 11:17: Paris time

By the cover of Le Soleil, the Orleanist morning paper, it was
July 1913. Louis Philippe Robert, duc d'Orleans, was the

Mélanie l'Heuremaudit was driven away down the rue La Fayette

Had fled from school in Belgium as soon as she received the telegram
had been attached by the court. The mother had gone off to

Mélanie's head ached, but she didn't care. Or did but not

"Papa!" she screamed.

The driver winced, tapped the brake reflexively. "I am not

Up into the heights of Montmartre, aimed for the most distant
two large curls covering her ears, tickling the sides of

Papa had a strong bald skull and a brave mustache. Even in

This had been at Serre Chaude, their estate in Normandy,
gentle slope. Her skirt would fly above her hips, her black

The taxi stopped in front of a cabaret in the rue Germaine
the fare and was handed her bag from the top of the cab.

"You believed us after all." M. Itague stood, half-stooping

On the small stage, which faced a dining room filled only

"Mlle. Jarretiere"; using her stage name. He was short and

"I have nowhere to stay," she murmured.

"Here," announced Itague, "there's a back room. Here,
until we move."

"Move?" She gazed at the raving flesh of tropical blossom

"We have the Theatre de Vincent Castor," cried Satin. He

Itague grew excited, describing L'Enlevement des Vierges

She had wandered away, to the edge of stage right. Itague

A remarkable innovation would be the use of automata, to
"They're lovely creatures: one will even unfasten your ro

Was she listening? Of course: part of her. She stood awkw

She gazed up at the sky, through one of the room's side w

Her room was hot and airless. Asprawl in one corner was a

"Rehearsals will be here," Itague told her. "Two weeks be
a bartender near Place Pigalle.

Alone, she lay on the bed, wishing she could pray for rain

She may not have slept: her eyes opened to the same dim c

She rose, in a near-frenzy, removed blouse, skirt and und
hair. In the next room she found the costumes for L'Enlev

Back in the hot room she quickly removed shoes and stocki
rings of cerise, amethyst, gold and jungly green.

She lay back once more, hair spread above her on the pillow.

The lay figure in the corner was light and carried easily.

Tonight there would be a magic-lantern show. Itague sat down.

There weren't many. The scheme might succeed. Porcépic had
music. Opinion in the city was violently divided: once the

"The poor child," Satin was saying. The table in front of
the underbelly of a nauseous-yellow cloud.

"With the father deserted," said Itague, "she's free. The

The Russian looked up, sudden. A glass fell over on his table.

"- or nearly free."

"Fled to the jungles, I understand," Satin said. A waiter

"A gift. What had he ever given before? Have you seen the

"Itague, she certainly could be the most giving -"

"No. No, it is merely being reflected. The girl functions

"M. Itague, your late readings may have convinced you -"

"I
said ghost," Itague answered softly. "Its name is not l'H

The woman stood at their table, not waiting for them to r

"Will you join us," said Satin eagerly. Itague looked far

She owned a dress shop in the rue du Quatre-Septembre. W
a Poiret-inspired evening dress of crepe Georgette the co

Who knew her "soul," Itague wondered, glancing sideways a

"Our prima ballerina has arrived today," said Itague. He

"Mélanie l'Heuremaudit," his patroness smiled. "When shall
I meet her?"

"Any time," Satin muttered, shifting glasses, keeping his

"Was there objection from the mother?" she asked.

The mother did not care, the girl herself, he suspected,

The woman sat, lost in watching the night, which envelope

The tango still played: or perhaps a different one, he hadn't been listening. A new dance, and popular. The h

The curtain hung in total stillness. If Itague could have

The woman had been watching him, expressionless, poised l

The song was in Latin. He'd just composed it for a Black Mass

They left Satin shuffling empty wine-glasses, looking as

Mélanie dreamed. The lay figure hung half off the bed, it

"You must turn over," he repeated insistently. She was too embarrassed to ask w

"Between my thighs," she whispered, moving on the bed. Th

"I got you in time," he breathed. "You would have stopped, had I not. . ."

The face of the lay figure had, been turned toward her, a

She woke up, not screaming, but moaning as if sexually ar

Itague was bored. This Black Mass had attracted the usual

Itague didn't really want to talk with Gerfaut. He wanted
female arm, fashioned in silver. The hand was cupped, and

Gerfaut had been describing the plot of his latest novel.

"A child, and yet a woman," Gerfaut said. "And a quality

The old satyr.

Gerfaut at length moved away. It was nearly morning. Itag
were all bathed in an exhausted yellow light, filtered th

The lady was absorbed in burning tiny holes with the tip

II

The next day the same clouds were over the city, but it c
nostalgic, snuffled over his guitar.

Mélanie, looking newly scrubbed and wearing the dress she

By noon the dancers had arrived, most of the girls seemin

"Which one is she?" The woman again. In Montmartre, 1913,

"Over
there with Porcépic."

She hurried over to be introduced. Vulgar, thought Itague

Porcépic sat at the piano, playing Adoration of the Sun.

Mélanie had hurried off to change to her Su Feng costume.

"You are not real."

"I . . ." Hands resting dead on her thighs.

"Do you know what a fetish is? Something of a woman which
but is not a woman. A shoe, a locket . . . une jarretiere

Mélanie could not speak.

"What are you like unclothed? A chaos of flesh. But as Su

The eyes would not respond. Not with fear, desire, anticipation.

It was never going to rain.

The Russian influence in Porcépic's music was usually transparent, piano out in Les Batignolles, fraternized with a strange

Kholsky entered as the sun fell, hidden by yellow clouds.

"Nothing surprises me," answered Porcépic. "If history were

"A decadence is a falling-away," said Kholsky. "We rise."

"A decadence," Itague put in, "is a falling-away from what we
the less human we become. Because we are less human, we fall

The girl and the woman had moved away from the stage's ornate

"Your beliefs are non-human," he said. "You talk of people

"So they are," mused Kholsky, dreamy-eyed. "I, Satin, Porcépic

"Rhythm," snorted Itague, "as if you listened to the jitters
a metaphysical bedspring." The tailor laughed, delighted,

"Come," said Porcépic. "To L'Ouganda," Satin on a table of

Outside they passed the woman, holding Mélanie by the arm

As they descended the moving stairs, the woman said, "You
pronounced the silent e's, as if she were singing. Air in

After some time had passed the train climbed to ground level

They walked for what seemed a mile: arrived, finally, at
the woman's rooms, the girl lay down without invitation on

If you've not already guessed, "the woman" is, again, the

Not only was she V., however, but also V. in love. Herbert
belongs to, are not so bad either. Such may have been the

But as for V. - V. in love - the hidden motives, if there

One day the girl arrived at Le Nerf accompanied by the woman
jacket. Moreover, her head - all her thick buttock-length

At every rehearsal, the woman sat at a rear table, watching
and it was clear which one was which, the woman should have

But what actually was going on at the loft in Grenelle? For
the Theatre Vincent Castor had conjured up a different scene

How disappointed they all would have been. Had they seen

V. at the age of thirty-three (Stencil's calculation) had
is one of inanimate monuments and buildings; near-inanimate
only in the rate of exchange; politics are of course never

The lady V., one of them for so long, now suddenly found
to Stencil, years later. Perhaps he felt guilty about his
it seems, a real voyeur to complete the illusion that her

As for V., she recognized - perhaps aware of her own prog
between sexes but between quick and dead; human and fetis

If she were Victoria Wren, even Stencil couldn't remain a

The Florentine spring, the young entrepreneuse with all s

If V. suspected her fetishism at all to be part of any co
the animate world, any sudden establishment here of a col

What would have been her reaction, had she known? Again,
step: Cairo, Florence, Paris - that she fitted into a lar
move her flawless nylon limbs, hydraulic fluid be sent by

Why did she tell so much to Porcépic? She was afraid, she
else should he've done? Pass moral judgment? Love is love

The night of the performance arrived. What happened then at the Theatre Vincent Castor.

Before the first act was barely under way, there came catastrophe.

Itague and Satin screamed at each other in the wings, neither knowing what to do.

"Can you hear the music?" Not too well, she admitted. "Don't worry," he shrugged, made a moue. "If I ever have money again," more to himself than to her.

The second act was even noisier. Only toward the end were the dancers vowed at that moment never to touch drugs again, never to touch each other.

Two of the male dancers, whom Itague had never left off of, were the only ones who remained. The conception depended on Su Feng continuing her dance without interruption.

The pole was now erect, the music four bars from the end. The audience held its breath.

It never opened. Mélanie was supposed to have worn a protège-poitrine which the point of the pole fit. She had left it off. A protest was heard.

Of the woman, her lover, nothing further was seen. Some voices were heard.

Rumor had it that a week or so later the lady V. ran off with the dancer. At least they both disappeared from Paris at the same time.

Chapter Fifteen

Sahha

I

Sunday morning around nine the Rollicking Boys arrived at

I am heading for the Whitney. Kisch mein tokus, Profane.

"Mene, mene, tekell, upharsin," said Stencil.

"Ho, hum," said Profane, preparing to sack out on the floor.

"Eigenvalue got robbed last night," she said. "It made the

"How about that," Profane said, scrutinizing the front page.
Daring early morning burglary."

"Paola," said Stencil, behind him. Profane flinched. Paola

"Three are in it. Now."

At last she looked back at Profane: "You're coming to Mal

"No," but weak.

"Why?" he said. "Malta never showed me anything. Anywhere

"Benny, if the cops -"

"Who are the cops to me? Stencil's got the teeth." He was

"Stencil, buddy, what do you say to one of us - going bac

"Was all that rigmarole with the rope just a way to get m

Nobody said anything.

Paola looked about ready to burst from her tracks, bawlin

All of a sudden there was noise in the hallway. Somebody

Stencil, jamming the teeth into one pocket, dashed away f

"Is this here Rachel Owlglass at home," he said. Explaine

"Rachel will be back soon," said Paola gravely. "We'll ta

"I got his feet," Profane said. They
hauled Rooney into Rachel's room and dumped him on the bed

"Thank you, officer." Cool as any old-movie's internation

Ten Eyck left, deadpan.

"Benito, things are falling apart. The sooner I get Home

"Good luck."

"Why won't you come?"

"We're not in love."

"No."

"No debts outstanding, either way, not even an old romance

Shook her head: real tears now.

"Why then."

"Because we left Teflon's place in Norfolk."

"No, no."

"Poor Ben." They all called him poor. But to save his fee

"You are only eighteen," he said, "and have this crush on
suede jacket with all those overdue tears. He thumped her

So it was of course then that Rachel walked in. Being a g

"Oho. So this is what happens behind my back. While I was

He had the common sense to go along with her. "Believe me

And we know who it was Rachel spent the rest of the day w

After a while Profane went off to the Spoon. Once there h
Profane ended up with two adoring camp followers working

Profane saw no street ahead but the Gut; thought that it

There was also the sea's highway. But that was a differen

II

Stencil, Profane and Pig Bodine made a flying visit to Wa

"I don't believe any of it," said Pig. "Stencil is a fake

"Stand by," was all Profane said.

"I suppose we ought to go out and get drunk," Pig said. S
capacity, or it was the worst drunk he had ever thrown. T

"I'm Flip," said the blonde, "and this is Flop."

Pig groaned momentarily nostalgic for Hanky and Panky. "E

"Obviously," said Flop. But the girl/boy ratio in Washing

Their place was near P Street, and they had amassed every
capital - legal and otherwise - 25 watts of that worthy,

After this overture, the weekend proceeded in flashes: Pi

"Where is Pig," Profane wondered.

"He stole my Mercury and he and Flop are on the way to Miami."

"Oh."

"To
get married!"

"It's a hobby of mine," continued Iago Saperstein, "to find out what people are up to."

"Benny is a schlemiel," said Flip.

"Schlemiels are very interesting," said Iago.

The party was out near the Maryland line; in attendance Ben had dedicated his life to finding the lost Vivaldi Kazoo.

"Give me back my white hat," said Pig.

"I thought you were in Florida," said Profane.

"Ha, ha," said the blonde, "you will have to catch me." And away they went, satyr and nymph.

The next Profane knew they were all back in Flip and Flop.

"Out," screamed Flip.

"Indeed," said Profane. At the bottom of the stairs were

He hadn't gone two blocks when there were yells behind him

"Oh-oh," said Profane. He fiddled with the gears, and promptly dropped into low.

"Thief," yelled Pig, laughing his obscene laugh. "Thief."

"It's all right officer," said Pig. "He's a friend, I won't

"Fine," said the cop. "I will." They were hauled down to

"Hey," said a cheerful wino from across the room, "you wa

Under the blue stamp on a pack of Camels is either an H or a
(the edge of the hand) you across the bicep, for the number

"Oh," said the wino. "What about rock, scissors and paper

Just about then a detail of Shore Patrolmen and civilian

"Aiye!" he screamed. "Me King Kong. Don't screw with me."

"There, there," an SP said, "King Kong doesn't talk. He c

So the boatswain's mate growled, and made a leap for an c

"Now what?" said one cop. This was answered by the fan, w
They jumped on and managed to secure him with three or fo

"Hey," said one of the SP's. "Lookit there in the drunk t

Pig opened an eye at them. "Oh well," he said, closed the

The cops came around to tell Profane he could go. "So lon

"Give Paola six for me," Pig grunted, shoeless, half asle

Back at the flophouse Stencil had a poker game going whic

"You're soft," Profane said, "you let them win on purpose

"No," Stencil said. "Money will be needed for the trip."

"It's set?"

"All set."

Somehow,
it seemed to Profane, things never should have come this

III

Now there was a private going-away party, just Profane and

Eigenvalue kept cool. Stencil even went to see him - perhaps

Sunday night Profane spent in Rachel's room with one sent

Later Profane lay with his head in her lap, her long hair
over to cover him and keep him warm. It being September t

"Listen," she whispered, holding the mouth of the bottle

"It's a happy sound."

"Yes." What percentage was there in telling her what it r

Next day they sailed. Fulbright types crowded them at the

"Sahha," said Paola.

"Sahha," echoed
Profane.

Chapter Sixteen

Valletta

I

Now there was a sun-shower over Valletta, and even a rain

"Fat Clyde," bellowed Howie.

"No," said Fat Clyde. "Whatever it is."

He must have been upset. Nobody ever says things like tha

Fat Clyde took a white hat out of his back pocket and tug

Bitch box came on. "Now turn in all paint and paint brush
to the paint locker," it said.

"About that time," said Howie. He crawled out from under

"Oh," said Fat Clyde and spat over the side. His eyes fol

Fat Clyde yawned. It rained in his mouth, but he didn't s
enough to be heard by anyone but Fat Clyde.

Now scuttlebutt being what it is, and sailors being, unde

Lazar the deck ape, who had been trying the radar gang no

"You should of stayed down in first division," Fat Clyde

"You want a cucumber,"
said Tiger, who was chopping up onions. "Here. I got a cu

"Slice it and put it on a plate," said Fat Clyde, "and ma

"Here." From the galley porthole. Pappy Hod was hanging o

That's the old Pappy Hod, thought Clyde. And he is wearin

"Get your ass in gear, Clyde," said Pappy Hod. "Liberty o

So of course Clyde was off like a streak for the fo'c's'l

"832 days," Tiger Youngblood snarled as Pappy and Clyde h

The Scaffold, resting on keel blocks, was propped up on e
of the drydock. From above, the Scaffold must have looked

On the starboard side rose a school or seminary with a cl

"High and dry," said Clyde.

"They say the Limeys are going to kidnap us," said Pappy.

"It may take longer than that anyway. Give me a cigarette
the screw -"

"And the barnacles." Pappy Hod was disgusted. "They will

They made their way through the Dockyard. Around them str

"Yardbirds are the same all over," Pappy said. He and Cly
over their heads. Bottoms of the baskets were barely cove

"What was that," Pappy smiled to nobody. "Admission charg

Towered over by ruins, they walked up a hill, around a gr

"Driver," came a yell from in back. "Hey driver. Stop the

Pappy slumped lower in his seat; tilted the white hat dow

"Driver, "

said Teledu of the A gang. "If you don't stop the bus I w

"Let's all go down and piss on the Forrestal

Till the damn thing floats away, ..."

which went to the tune of The Old Gray Mare and had start

"Once he has got an idea in his head," said Pappy, "he wo

"Look, look," said Fat Clyde. A yellow river of urine was

"A fun-loving good will ambassador," somebody remarked, "
newspapers, left lying on the seats. Teledu's comrades ap

"Pappy," Fat Clyde said, "you intending to go out and get

"I was thinking about it," said Pappy.

"That's what I was afraid of. Look, I know I'm out of line."

Ho was interrupted by a burst of merriment from the back of the room.

"Oh God," said Pappy. A couple-three of Teledu's fellow soldiers.

They pulled up to the Phoenicia Hotel at last: smoke still billowing from the streets, descending on Valletta.

Clyde and Pappy were last to get out. They apologized to the others.

"Why don't we go to a movie," Clyde said, a little desperately.

"Tomorrow is Hallowe'en," said Pappy, "and they better put out the candles."

"They never made one to hold old Lazar. Hot damn, it's crazy."

Kingsway seethed. There was this sense of containment, like a bomb about to go off.

"Now I was on an AKA during the war," observed Pappy as they drove away along Kingsway, "and just before D-day it was like the whole city was a bomb."

"Oh they was getting drunk in Yoko too, back during Korea

"Not like that was, or like this either. The Limeys have

All it was, was an English ruddy-faced jarhead and his Ma

Overhead, bombers screamed away toward Egypt. On some str

"Lace," said Fat Clyde. "What is it about lace."

"To make you think about a girl. Even if you don't have a
try to keep the subject alive.

From a Phillips Radio store to their left, news broadcast

"Oboy, oboy," said Fat Clyde wearily.

"High and dry," said Pappy Hod, "and the only ship in the

"Where are you going," Fat Clyde yelled from the corner.

"The Gut,"
said Pappy, "where else."

"Oh." Clyde came stumbling downhill. "I figured maybe we

Pappy grinned: reached out and patted Clyde's beer belly.

I'm just trying to be helpful, Clyde thought. But: "Yes,"

Pappy guffawed and they roistered away down the hill. The

Strait Street - the Gut - was as crowded as Kingsway, but
angle. "Rocks," whispered Clyde. "He always looks for rock

"See," said Pappy, getting philosophical. "Richest country

"But it's not good-bye for us." said Clyde.

"Who knows. There's revolutions in Hungary and Poland, fi

"She can't, she can't. She said she'd wait for me."

They entered the Four Aces. It was early yet, and no one
drunks like Leman were causing any commotion. They sat at

The barmaid who brought their drinks was new: at least CL

But the music stopped, she saw them, headed over. Clyde c

"How's your wife?" she asked, of course.

"I hope she's well."

Elisa, bless her
heart, dropped it. "You want to dance? Nobody broke your

Nimble Pappy was on his feet. "Let's set a new one."

Good, thought Clyde: good. After a while, who should come

"When we going to get the screw fixed, Johnny?"

Johnny because this officer had been a white hat sent to

"I am feeling more and more guilty about the screw," said
just slipped off from a stuffy do over at the British Off

"I don't get it," said Fat Clyde.

"We voted in the Security Council with Russia and against

"Pappy says the Limeys are going to kidnap us."

"I don't know."

"What about the screw?"

"Drink your beer, Fat Clyde." Johnny Contango felt guilty and drift, and pure accident had brought them here to get

"Bwaagghh."

"Pingue, I'll bet," Johnny said without looking around.

"Yup. All over his blues." The owner had materialized and

"Poor Pingue," Johnny said. "He's an early one."

Out on the floor Pappy was up to about a dozen, and showed

"We ought
to get him into a cab," Fat Clyde said.

"Where is Baby Face." Falange the snipe, and Pingue's bu

"Here, you drink it," the bartender said. Pingue lifted

"Andale, man," he said gently, raising Pingue's head. Pi

"Falange!" Pinguez screamed, drawing out the a's.

"You hear that," said Baby Face.

"That's all he has to say on the quarterdeck and my ass h

Johnny took Pinguez under the arms; Fat Clyde, more nervo

"Back to the great gray mother," said Johnny. "Come on. Y

"I should keep an eye on Poppy. You know."

"I know. But he'll be busy dancing."

"As long as he doesn't get to the Metro," said Fat Clyde.

"Sort of quiet," said Johnny Contango. But this was prema
even now sneaking alum into Antoine's beer which sat uney

"SP's will be busy tonight," said Johnny. "How come Pappy

"I never had that happen to me, that way," Clyde said, a

"Sorry. I was thinking today in the rain how it was I cou

"Oh I think he should have stayed on board," said Clyde,

"Right ho," said Johnny Contango, slurping beer.

A scream from the street. "That's tonight's," said Johnny

"Bad street."

"Back during the beginning of all this in July the Gut ra

In came two Commandos, looking around for somewhere to si

David and Maurice their names were, and heading off
for Egypt tomorrow.

"We shall be there," said Maurice, "to wave hello when yo

"If ever," said Johnny.

"World's going to hell," said David. They'd been drinking

"Don't expect to hear from us till the election is over,"

"Oh, is that it then."

"Why America is sitting on its ass," brooded Johnny, "is

"The jolly, jolly balloon," said Maurice. "Going up."

"Did you hear a bloke got murdered just as we came in." D

"More blokes than that will get murdered in Egypt," said
the ones who want it. Not us.

"But my brother is on Cyprus, and I shall never live it o

The Commandos outdrank them two-for-one. Johnny, never ha

The group on the stand had moved from Route 66 to Every D

"Ech," said Antoine Zippo, slamming the beer down on the

"There goes Pappy,"
said Clyde, grabbing for his hat. Antoine Zippo leaped li

David turned to Maurice. "I wish the Yanks would save the

"Still," said Maurice, "it would be good practice."

"I heartily agree," pip-pipped David in a toff's voice: "

"Bung ho." The two Commandos waded into the growing melee.

Clyde and Johnny were the only two heading for the door.

Clyde hung his head. "I suppose we ought to go to the Met
them.

They passed an alley. Facing them on the blank wall, in c

flanked by two of the most common British sentiments in t

"No petrol, indeed," said Johnny Contango. "They're blowi

Kilroy was possibly the only objective onlooker in Vallet
(as well as Freudian) psychology.

But it was all deception.

Kilroy by 1940 was already bald, middle-aged. His true or

[...]

Inanimate. But Grandmaster of Valletta tonight.

"The Bobbsey Twins," said Clyde. Running around the corne

"Look," yelled Dahoud approaching. "We can do it running." Leroy slowed down and cut in behind his

"Giddap there, boss," Leroy screamed, and away they dashed

"Wot's all that noise we hear?"

"Fight," said Johnny. "Union Jack."

"Right ho." Back in formation, the boy ordered a column

"We're missing all the fun," whined Clyde.

"There is Poppy."

They entered the Metro. Poppy sat at a table with a barmen. He was doing his "Chicago" bit. They waited till it was

"Twenty-five dances," he said as they approached. "I broke

"There is a nice fight on at the Union Jack," suggested C

"Or how about that whorehouse the chief off the Hank that

Poppy shook his head. "You guys ought to know this was th

So they begin: these vigils. Having put up their token re

The Metro looked like a nobleman's pied-a-terre applied t
lined with statues in niches: statues of Knights, ladies

Along the sides of the room were great stone urns, with p
Powell, the American Singing Marine, caroling Sally and S

Early tomorrow deck hands would come out in the bleaching

Pappy got drunk, stinking drunk: and drew his two keepers
presents he'd given her, the places they'd gone, the cook

But it was Cinderella liberty in Malta, and though the dr

"We'll go get a taxi," said John. "Carry him home in a ta

"Jeez, it's late." They were the last Americans in the Me

Clyde and Johnny draped Pappy around them and got him dow
into the street. "Taxi, hey," Clyde screamed.

"No taxis," said Johnny Contango. "All gone. God how big

Clyde wanted to argue. "You just let me take him," he sai

"Who said I was an officer. I'm a white hat. Your brother

"Taxi, taxi, taxi."

"Limey's brother, everybody's brother. Who says I'm an of

"Paola," Pappy moaned and pitched forward. They grabbed h

"Pappy is going bald," said Clyde. "I never noticed."

"You never do till you're drunk."

They made their way slow and unsteady down the Gut, yelling
for a taxi. None came. The street had a silent look but w

"What is it," said Johnny, "revolution?"

Better than that: it was a free-for-all among 200 Royal C

Clyde and Johnny dragged Pappy round the corner and into

"Oh-oh," said Johnny. The noise woke Pappy, who called fo
said Johnny, landing three feet away. Clyde had also fled

But they found their way blocked by Marines, who'd come u

"Hey Billy Eckstine," yelled the Commandos in front of Da
each and sneaky-Peted away. Behind them, the Marines and

"Cops," somebody yelled. Half a dozen cherry bombs went o

"You mean that," Dahoud scratched his head, "that if I to

"Hoorah Billy Eckstine!" they cried.

"O no man," Dahoud said. "I don't apologize to nobody." C

For some reason they shuffled into a kind of formation.

"Yeah," Dahoud grinned. "Right, FACE." So they did.

"Awright men. Let's goooo!" Down came the arm, and away t

Clyde, Johnny
and Poppy Hod struggled free of the brawl, dodged round a

A taxi pulled up next to the three. "Follow that platoon,

"Who's the little rodent

That's getting more than me?

F-U-C-K-E-Y Y-O-U-S-E."

A legacy from Pig Bodine, who'd watched this particular kind of words. He did, receiving in exchange a fifth of Irish whiskey.

This weird procession crept along Kingsway until intercepted.

"Billy Eckstine," Dahoud grinned. "Jeez."

"We got to go back," Leroy said. The driver made a U-turn.

"I'll be damned," said Dahoud.

"You'd think it never happened," said Leroy.

"Dockyard," Clyde instructed the driver, yawning. "Dry dock can with the teeth marks of a screw-chewing fish."

All the way out to the Dockyard Pappy snored.

Liberty had been expired an hour when they arrived. The town

"Now none of that was worth it," Johnny said bitterly. Tw

"Come on," Clyde urged Pappy. "Few more steps."

Nasty Chobb came running by, wearing an English sailor ha

"Robert," she said. Not a question.

"Hello Pappy," said the other.

"Who zat," said Clyde.

Johnny stopped dead and Clyde's momentum carried Pappy ro

"Poor Robert." But she said it gently, and was smiling, and had either Johnny or Clyde been less drunk,

Pappy wagged his arms. "Go ahead," he told them, "I can

"Your hat says H.M.S. Ceylon, Chobb."

"So."

"So what can I say? You're on the wrong ship."

"Profane," said Pappy. "You came back. I thought you would."

"I didn't," Profane said. "But she did." He went off to work.

"Hello Paola," said Pappy. "Sahha." It means both.

"You -"

"You -" at the same time. He motioned her to talk.

"Tomorrow," she said, "you'll be hung over and probably with a headache. But I'm real, and here, and if they restrict you -"

"I can put in a chit."

"Or send you off to Egypt or anywhere else, it should make no difference."

"If I can get off?"

"I'll be gone. Let it be this way, Robert." How tired her

"I love you," was all he could find to say. He'd been say

White hands flickered up, behind her face. "Here. In case
Her hair fell loose. She handed him an ivory comb. Five o

He nodded. "We ought to be back early December."

"You'll get your good-night kiss then." She smiled, witho

Pappy ambled on past the latrine without looking back. TH

II

Of their dash across the Continent in a stolen Renault; B
by friends of Stencil - a monk long defrocked named Fenic

They came in to Valletta, cold, yawning,
in the rain. They rode to Maijstral's room neither antici

Stencil thought a long time.

"I like," Profane continued, "living off of your money. B

"First things first," said Stencil. The rain had stopped,

See Maijstral he did: but only next day, and after a morn

But

it wasn't hard to talk to Maijstral.

"Stencil has seen your confession to Paola."

"Then you know," Maijstral said, "I only made it into thi

Stencil hung his head. "It may have been his father."

"Making us brothers."

There was wine, which helped. Stencil yarned far into the

Stencil sketched the entire history of V. that night and

"Ah," Maijstral said. "The glass eye."

"And you." Stencil mopped his forehead. "You listen like

"I have wondered." Smiling.

At the end of it:

"But Paola
showed you my apologia. Who is the priest? We have heard

"Not Stencil's," Stencil insisted. "Hers."

Maijstral shrugged. "Why have you come? She is dead."

"He must know."

"I could never find that cellar again. If I could: it must

"Too deep already," Stencil whispered. "Stencil's long ov

"I was lost."

"But not apt to have visions."

"Oh, real enough. You always look inside first, don't you

"Yet you'd just come from -"

"I did think of Elena. Yes. Latins warp everything to the
that. Too much so to feel hatred or triumph, watching."

"Only pity. Is that what you mean? At least in what Stencil

"More a passiveness. The characteristic stillness, perhaps

Stencil brightened after a while and changed course. "A t

"I wasn't watching the children. I was watching your V. W

"Please."

Next day, and for days after, he investigated the inventory
up in bed.

"Fever," she said. "Too much booze, too much everything b

"I'll recover," Profane croaked. "Tough shit, Stencil."

"He says you're down on him. "

"O God," said Stencil.

The next day brought momentary encouragement to Stencil.

She lived in a tenement. Stucco walls, a row of balconies

white or black.

"I threw it into the sea." Hands on hips, defiant. He smi

Profane sat in a worn flowered robe of Fausto Maijstral's

He awoke at four in the morning and walked through a sea-

Maijstral was asleep at his table. "Don't haunt me, Stenc

"Stencil is passing
on the discomfort of being haunted," Stencil shivered.

They huddled over tea in chipped cups.

"She cannot be dead," Stencil said.

"One feels her in the city," he cried.

"In the city."

"In the light. It has to do with the light."

"If the soul," Maijstral ventured, "is light. Is it a pre

"Damn the word. Stencil's father, had he possessed imagin

Lighting up: "Maijstral. Stencil expresses himself like a

"But your search fascinates me."

"Did you know, he's devised a prayer. Walking about this
least hint from Maijstral. Let him not roam out all Gothi

"Come, come," muttered Maijstral. "I feel uncomfortable e

Stencil drew in his breath too loudly.

"No, I am not beginning to requestion. That is long done.

Beginning then Maijstral took up the study of Stencil mor

Mounting crisis in the Suez, Hungary and Poland hardly to
of what was happening in the rest of the world, reinforce

Stencil, returning to the lodging-house, walked into a lo

"So go," he was yelling. Something crashed against the do

"Don't try to make up my mind for me," she yelled back. S

"What the hell."

Profane, crouching like a toad, flapped a newspaper at hi

"Ah." Stencil dived for the bed. Profane had been sleeping
Stencil; snuffled, and drifted off to sleep.

At length it occurred to him to talk with the old priest,

The moment he entered the church he knew he'd lost again.

Later, in the priest's house:

"God lets some of us wait, in queer backwaters," said Fat

"Oh, I was only a young lad then, full of myth. The Knight
had only served as padre - in the actual fighting - long

Politely as he could Stencil took leave of the old priest

Foolish Stencil: he was out of condition. He returned to

"Clinches it," he muttered. If it were the same Fairing.

Even if it were not, could it matter? A phrase (it often
and tongue movement: "Events seem to be ordered into an o

"Paola's back with her husband," said Profane and collaps

"Someone," Stencil muttered, "is out of it, then." Profan

"No."

Profane flopped over, fished under the bed in his ditty b

Neither spoke for a while but Stencil was too distraught

"Tell Paola's father. I'm only along for the ride."

Stencil began to pace. Laughed: "Stencil doesn't think he

"V.'s is a country of coincidence, ruled by a ministry of

"Stencil came on Father Fairing's name once, apparently b

"I wonder," said Profane, "if that was the same Father Fa
. . . ."

Stencil froze, the booze jittering in his glass. While Pr

Carefully Stencil finished the whisky, cleaned out the gl

"You going out for a doctor," Profane said into the pillow.

"Of sorts," Stencil said.

An hour later he was at Maijstral's.

"Don't wake her," Maijstral said. "Poor child. I'd never

"Nor have you seen Stencil cry," said Stencil, "but you must

"Profane?" In an attempt at good humor: "We must get to E

"Aren't you a frustrated
exorcist?"

Maijstral frowned. "That's another Maijstral."

"She possesses him," Stencil whispered. "V."

"You are as sick."

"Please."

Maijstral opened the window and stepped out on the balcony.

Stencil shrank at the cold air moving in through the window.

"I'm not a priest. Don't try appealing to someone you've

"Fairing," Stencil croaked, "in whose
Parish Stencil was shot, preceded your Father Avalanche."

"I could have told you. Told you the name."

"But."

"Saw no advantage in making things worse."

Stencil's eyes narrowed. Maijstral turned, caught him looking.

"Yes, yes. Thirteen of us rule the world in secret."

"Stencil went out of his way to bring Profane here. He should

Maijstral turned smiling to him. Gestured behind his back.

Two days later Maijstral arrived at the lodging-house to

Maijstral gave Profane's
forehead the back of his hand: fine. The fever had broken

'A shipfitter named Aquilina has intelligence of one Mme.

Maijstral looked around for booze. Profane had finished e

"Swine."

Profane woke. "Wha."

Maijstral read him the note, Profane rolled out of bed an

"What day is it." After a while: "Paola's gone too?"

"Last night."

"Leaving me. Well. How do you dispose of me."

"Lend you a fiver, to begin
with."

"Lend," roared Profane. "You ought to know better."

"I'll be back," said Maijstral.

That night Profane shaved, bathed, donned suede jacket, I
up as come marriage and the Good Life, someday soon now -

Valletta was the end of another season and all her friend

So over sloe gin fizzes for her which took tiny sweet bit
some of us do go nowhere and can con ourselves into belie

That night between them they established at least that th

"Don't be sad."

"Brenda, we're all sad."

"Benny,
we are." She laughed, raucous, having a low tolerance for

They went back to his place and she must have left him so

"I have brought wine," said Maijstral.

"Good enough."

They went out to a café for breakfast, about two. "I have

"I should get a job. Any road work in Malta?"

"They are building a grade intersection - an underground

"Road work and sewer work is all I know."

"Sewers? There's a new pumping station going up at Marsa.

"They hire aliens?"

"Possibly."

"Possibly,
then."

That evening Brenda wore paisley shorts and black socks.

"Oh," said Profane.

"I am the twentieth century," she read. Profane rolled av

"I am the ragtime and the tango; sans-serif, clean geomet

"That sounds about right," said Profane.

"I don't know." She
made a paper airplane out of the poem and sailed it across

"Yes."

"You've done so much more. Boys do."

"What?"

"You've had all these fabulous experiences. I wish mine w

"Why."

"The experience, the experience. Haven't you learned?"

Profane didn't have to think long. "No," he said, "offhan

They were quiet for a while. She said: "Let's take a walk

Later, out in the street, near the sea steps she inexplic
silence, all illumination in Valletta, houselight and str

Epilogue

1919

I

Winter. The green xebec whose figurehead was Astarte, good

He kept near the stern, rained on, bird-frame wrapped in
wind, holystoning to work off this morning's chill. His o

"Whenever we came to Malta," he said in some Levantine to
She's an inconstant city. Be wary of her."

One hulking boy stood on the quay to receive their lines.

Stencil had his gear collected. The rain descended more o

"An inconstant goddess." The pier hand who'd taken their
white fumes then, he and Mehemet made farewell. He teeter

From the window of a cab, proceeding in the rain along St

"I cannot understand your attitude," from Carruthers-Pill

Stencil muttered something about things not being stabil
chit initialed by the Foreign Secretary much as Moses mus

Lieutenant Mungo Sheaves, aide to the Officer Administrat
Behind it all lurked "the Doctor"; organizer, civil engin

It must be shock, fine: even Stencil could feel shock. Te
the Franco-Prussian conflict, the Sudanese wars, even the

On route to Valletta - the steamer to Syracuse, the week

"You're
old," the skipper mused over his nightly hashish. "I am o
never change. Whatever his true nostalgia, he reckoned by

"Slung on a stage over the gunwale of an old felucca, the
Tuareg: 'The master is gone, the crew is gone, I am here

"Am I only getting old?" Stencil wondered. "Perhaps past

"The only change is toward death," repeated Mehemet cheer
and late we are in decay." The helmsman began to sing a m

"Which way does it go? As a youth I believed in social pr

"Is old age a disease?" Mehemet asked. "The
body slows down, machines wear out, planets falter and lo

"Because we do paint the side of some Peri or other, don't

"No more than the pustules of smallpox have anything to d

"Of course," said Stencil, thinking of something else, "o

The Armageddon had swept past, the professionals who'd su

Then Mehemet told him of Mara.

"Another of your women."

"Ha, ha. Indeed. Maltese for woman."

"Of course."

"She

is - if you care for the word - a spirit, constrained to

"Now the Great Siege was after my time, but legend - one
Soon as the ship had passed the invisible circle centered

"They brought her to the serail into the presence of the
is always a slight bow to the nose, a wide spacing of the

"She pleased the Sultan. Perhaps she made the effort. But

"Soon - a matter of weeks - the Sultan noticed a certain
Almost - how to say it - smug, and keeping a bad secret o

"At length it occurred to His Ghostly Magnificence, nearl

"'Woman, '
began the Sultan.

"She raised a hand, 'I have done it all,' she recited swe

"Bewildered at such ready confession, his tender Moslem s

"Her smile never fading, her voice placid as before, Mara

"So confidently did she speak that the Sultan began to fe

"Back home the Turks, led by Dragut and the pashas Piali
had laid siege to Malta. You know generally how it went.

"Now after St. Elmo had fallen, Mustafa (possibly in sorr

"One of the great mysteries about the Siege is why, when

"History

says because of a rumor. Don Garcia de Toledo, viceroy of

"But the truth is this: the words were spoken directly to
Renaissance had ever touched him; he resided at the Aubert

Mehemet recited:

Fleeing the mistral, fleeing the sun's hot lash,

Serene in scalloped waves, and sculptured sky

The head feels no rain, fears no pitchy night,

As o'er this ancient sea it races stars,

Empty but for a dozen fatal words,

Charmed by Mara, Mara my only love . . .

There follows an apostrophe to Mara."

Stencil nodded sagely, trying to fill in with Spanish cog

"Apparently," Mehemet concluded, "the head returned to Co
slipped aboard a friendly galiot, disguised as a cabin bo

The joke being that shalom is Hebrew for peace and also t

"Beware of Mara," the old sailor said then. "Guardian spi

"She's restless. She will find ways to reach out from Val

Now sprinting from the taxi through the rain to his hotel
in Syracuse to anaesthetize that for a while - as at the

"Every night to the Dog and Bell

Young Stencil loved to go

To dance on the tables and shout and sing

And give 'is pals a show.

His little wife would stay to home

'Er 'eart all filled wiv pain

But the next night sharp at a quarter to six

'E'd be down to the pub again. Until

That one fine evening in the monf of May

He announced to all as came wivin 'is sight

You must get along wivout me boys

I'm through wiv rowdiness and noise.

Cause Stencil's going 'ome tonight;"

[In palmier days a chorus of junior F.O. operatives would

"'Ere, wot's this? Wot's the matter wiv Stencil?

Wot's the reason for such a change of 'eart?"

[To
which Stencil would answer]:

"Gather round me closely lads

And I the most forlorn of cads

Will tell you all ere I depart:"

[Refrain]

"I've just become the father to a bouncing baby boy

And Herbert blithering Stencil is 'is name.

'E's a card

And treats me wiv regard

Though I 'awe to change 'is nappies all the same.

I don't know where we got the time to make 'im,

Cause I've been coming 'ome drunk most every night,

But 'e's cute and fat as a kidney pie

And looks like 'is ma and that is why

Stencil's going 'ome tonight

(Just ask the milkman)

Stencil's going 'ome tonight."

Out of the tub, dry, back in tweeds, Stencil stood at the

At length came a knock at the door. It would be Maijstral
a stunted oak. Maijstral stood there neither aggressive nor

"He comes of noble family," Mehemet had revealed sadly. S

"What of the Dockyard people," Stencil asked.

"They will attack the Chronicle." (A grievance stemming from
had started, somehow, that the government was refusing pa

Stencil wanted to ask: if you sympathize, why inform? He

Maijstral told him all he knew and left, expressionless and
consulted a map of Valletta, and five minutes later was s

This was normal precaution. Of course, a certain double s

Ahead Maijstral now turned left, away from the lights of

Massive public buildings with characterless façades; networks for rendezvous points, which stand out like sequins on an

"If there is any political moral to be found in this world

"What of the real present the men-of-no-politics, the ones

Strada Stretta; Strait Street. A passage meant, one felt, Greek, Italian and North African merchantmen; and a suppo

But he increased his pace through the thickening crowds;

To his right he became aware of a persistent image, flicker there.

"Chaire," muttered the priest.

"Chaire, Papa," said Stencil out of the side of his mouth

"One moment, Sidney," said the voice. "Come over here, ou

That voice was damned familiar. "Maijstral is going to th

"Presto change-ho," and off came the holy man's black bea

"Demivolt, you've grown crude in your old age. What sort

"They're all right," sang Demivolt, hopping clumsily about

"What about Moffit," Stencil said. "As long as they're still
the Florence crew."

"Moffit caught it in Belgrade. I thought you'd heard." De

"God knows who all they've sent to Valletta," said Demivo

"Don't look at me. I have only a hint what's up. The nati

"Yes, I've seen Fairing. If his paycheck is coming out of

"Oh

I doubt, I doubt," Stencil said vaguely, wanting to talk

"Maijstral always sits out in front; we'll go across the

"Odd how paths cross."

Stencil nodded.

"Are we meant to keep tabs on one another? Or were we mea

"Meant?" too quickly. "By Whitehall, of course."

"Of course."

As we get older we skew more toward the past. Stencil had
a signal for the reactivation of the same chaotic and Sit

For Fairing's prediction of massacre, and its attendant p

"Short of examining the entire history of each individual

He indeed was visited by dreams in which he had shrunk to
then through the skull, dura mater, arachnoid, pia mater

Nodes of Ranvier, sheath of Schwann, vein of Galen; tiny

Assume, then, a prospect of chaos in the streets, joined
tourism, is a kind of communion. By its special magic a l

- The poor would seek revenge against the millers, who al

- The civil servants would be out looking for a fairer sh

- The tradesmen would want repeal of the Succession and D

- Bolsheviks among the yardbirds could only be satisfied
- The anti-colonial extremists would seek of course to sw
Damn the consequences. Though probably Italy would enter
- The Abstentionists wanted a new constitution.
- The Mizzists - comprising three clubs: Giovine Malta, D
- The Church - here perhaps Stencil's C. of E. stuffiness

The matter of a Paraclete's coming, the comforter, the do
genius of the liberal love-feast which had produced 1848

Especially on Malta, a matriarchal island. Would the Para

Enough, lad, he told himself. You're in dangerous waters.

"Don't turn around now," Demivolt broke in conversational

When Stencil did turn around he saw only a vague figure i

"That is Veronica Manganese."

"Gustavus V is ruler of Sweden. You are brimful of intell

Demivolt gave Stencil a thumbnail dossier on Veronica Mar
them D'Annunzio the poet-militant, and one Mussolini, an

"He's a double agent, then."

"It would seem so."

"Why don't I go back to London. You seem to be doing quit

"Negative, negative, Sidney. You do remember Florence."

A waiter materialized with more Barcelona beer. Stencil f

"Call Vheissu a symptom. Symptoms like that are always al

"Sweet Christ, we've only
now concluded one. Are they quite ready, do you think, to

"I don't think," Demivolt smiled grimly. "I try not to. S

"Now you and I are only private-soldiers. For myself, I w

"And so they want us together," Stencil murmured.

"As of now. Who knows what they'll want tomorrow?"

"And I wonder who else is here."

"Look sharp. There they go." They let the two across the

So they made their way down Strada Stretta, Demivolt look

"The roads are terrible," Demivolt admitted, "but we have

"I'm frightened to death of automobiles."

Indeed he was. On route to the villa Stencil clutched the

"Isn't this rather crude," he gritted, huddled behind the

"At the speed she's going she'll lose us soon enough," Demivolt chirruped, all breezy. "Relax, Sidney."

They moved southwest into Floriana. Ahead, Veronica Manga

"They're not that sort." After awhile Demivolt turned right mere spectacle. She ceased to exist as anything quick or

The Villa di Sammut lay past Sliema near the sea, elevated like bodily organs not quite human - which pierced its st

"Where have we seen this before," he whispered.

One light in an upper story went out. "Come," said Demivolt

"Are we looking for anything particular," Stencil asked.

A lantern came on behind them and a voice said, "Turn rou

Stencil had a strong stomach and all the cynicism of a no
a roughly circular expanse of silver. The shadows thrown

"You are spies?" the voice inquired, an English voice twi

"Both of you," the mouth said. "Both of you then." And te

"Old running mate," Demivolt
said, "there is a tremendous nostalgia about this show. D

"Was that in Florence?"

"The rest of us were. Why not?"

"I don't like duplication of effort."

"This occupation sees nothing else." The tone was grim.

"Another one?"

"Oh, hardly so soon. But give it twenty years."

Although Stencil had been face to face with her caretaker

II

But the second meeting had to wait on the coming of a king

There had been no attack on the Chronicle. On 3 February political censorship of the Maltese press was abolished.

But three weeks later, a "National Assembly" met in Valletta

"Trouble," Demivolt said darkly.

"Not necessarily." Though Stencil knew the difference between "gathering" and "mob" is fine indeed. Anything might touch

The night before the meeting a play at the Manoel Theatre

"Considerate of them," Demivolt remarked next day as they

As the day progressed small bands of agitators, most of them (handicrafts or outdoor sports), roamed the streets, break

"Grasp this moment," Demivolt said, "hold it close, exami

True: no one had been particularly excited. But Stencil w

But all that came from the meeting was adoption of Mizzi's
called for 7 June.

"Three and a half months," Stencil said. "It will be warm

"It seems rather a good lookout," Demivolt protested. "If

"It rained," said Stencil. "It was cold."

La Voce del Popolo and the Maltese-language papers continued
the spark of a leader, a Mizzi or equivalent, to touch it

"How does she feel," Stencil asked once with unaccustomed

"She will be a mother soon," Maijstral answered, gloomy.

Stencil's boy-romanticism seized on this: perhaps there w

"Tip our hand that way. We have an ear already in the vil

If the

Dockyard were the only trouble spot to watch, Stencil mig

"Being a Jesuit," said the priest, "of course there are o
initial meeting - shortly after the first trip out to Ver

So with Fairing. "We are all spies in this together," tha
to be his assumption, here is a spy who has risen above t

"Any tug in the direction of anarchy is anti-Christian,"

An old dame trying to cover up a flaming youth? Ha!

Actually Fairing, as a source, was ideal. Malta being, af
first place? What was the man afraid of?

For it was not mere love of politicking and intrigue. If

And then, with Armistice to be exposed abruptly at every

It was the Paraclete he feared. He was quite content with

Fairing, Maijstral, puzzlement over the identity of the h
in the rear of the church, elbows hung over the back of t

Was Fairing too a double agent? If so, then it was actual

She arose and left the church, passing Stencil on route.

Nostalgia and melancholy . . . Hadn't he bridged two worl
whose uneasy floor made and unmade islands every year, th

Stencil, at home everywhere in Europe, had thus come out

F.O. continued to be uncommunicative and unhelpful. Stenc

"I've been afraid of that. We are old."

"It was different once," Stencil asked, "wasn't it?"

They went out that night and got maudlin-drunk. But nosta
binge. He remembered rollicking down the hill to Strait S

There came, in time's fullness, One of Those Days. After

"To America. There is nothing I can do." Again the old, f

Could Stencil have sneered "God's will"; not likely. His

"Hardly," the priest smiled. "In the matter of Caesar and

"As there is between Caesar and Fairing? Or Caesar and St

"Something like that."

"Sahha, then. I
suppose your relief . . ."

"Father Avalanche is younger. Don't lead him into bad hab

"I see."

Demivolt was out at Hamrun, conferring with agents among

"Oh, come. Come."

A girl, obviously pregnant, who stood, only watching him.

"Do you speak English, then."

"I do. I am Carla Maijstral." She remained erect, shoulde

"He will be killed, or hurt," she said. "In wartime a woman

She wanted him sacked. Sack him? Why not. Double agents v

"Could you help, signor. Speak to him."

"How did you know? He didn't
tell you."

"The workers know there is a spy among them. It has become

"For God's sake," Stencil said irritably, "sit down."

Seated: "A wife knows things, especially one who will be

"And you came out looking for me."

"The priest told me."

Fairing. Who was working for whom? Caesar wasn't getting
to bring it all into the confessional?"

"He used to stay home at night. It will be our first child

"But a child also must be fed, sheltered, protected more

She grew angry. "Maratt the welder has seven children. He

God, she could blow the works. Could he tell her that eve

"My father -" curious he'd not caught that flickering edge
began to stay away from home. I never found out why. But

Threatening suicide? "Have you talked to your husband at

"It isn't a wife's place."

Smiling: "Only to talk to his employer. Very well, Signor

When she left, he began a bitter dialogue with himself. W

The Situation is always bigger than you, Sidney. It has l

I'm not a marriage counselor, or a priest.

Don't act as if it were a conscious plot against you. Who
here to this island and arranged them into this alignment

Oh, of course: look at Florence. A random pattern of colo

The inert universe may have a quality we can call logic.

But what then does one do? Is there a way out?

There is always the way out that Carla Maijstral threatened.

His musings were interrupted by Demivolt, who came stumbling in the door. "There's trouble."

"Oh indeed. That's unusual."

"Dupiro the ragman."

Good things come in threes. "How."

"Drowned, in Marsamuscetto. Washed ashore downhill from M

"It must have been I Banditti," Demivolt continued: "a ga

Stencil felt ill.

"We think they are connected somehow with the fasci di co

"The tide could have carried him across."

"They wouldn't want it out to sea, you know. Craftsmanship must have an audience, or it's worthless."

What's happened, he asked his other half. The Situation u

No time in Valletta. No history, all history at once . .

"Sit down, Sidney. Here." A glass of brandy, a few slaps

"All right, all right. Ease off. It's been the weather."

"The priest."

"What I thought. But we've had an ear lopped off out at t

"Short of starting an affair, one of us, with La Manganes

"Perhaps she's not attracted to the mature sort."

"I didn't mean it seriously."

"She did give me a curious look. That day at the church."

"You old dog. You didn't say you'd been slipping out to s
church." Attempting the light touch. But failing.

"It has deteriorated to the point where any move on our p

"Perhaps foolish. But confronting her directly . . . I'm

"I'm a pessimist. It keeps a certain balance. Perhaps I'm

"Wait, in any event. Till we see what Fairing does."

Spring had descended with its own tongue of flame. Vallet

"She may violate the secrecy of this little box," Fairing

"You know what Maijstral is," Stencil said, angry,
"and how many Caesars he serves. Can't you calm her? Don't

"Remember I am leaving," coldly: "speak to my successor,

"What a damned enigma you are," Stencil burst out. "Your

After a pause: "I can, of course, tell her that any drast

Anger had drained away. Remembering his "damned": "Forgiv

The priest chuckled. "I can't. You're an Anglican."

The woman had approached so quietly that both Stencil and

"My opposite number."

The voice, the voice - of course he knew it. As the priest
to betray no surprise - performed introductions, Stencil

So she had come to them. Stencil had kept his promise to

"We have met, Signorina Manganese."

"In Florence," came the voice behind the veil. "Do you re

"So."

"I wore the comb today. Knowing you would be here."

Whether or not he must now betray Demivolt, Stencil suspe
was an end had proved to be only a twenty-year stay. No u

Riding out to the villa in her Benz, he showed none of th

"We are on the same side, aren't we." She smiled. They'd
front, which certain elements in Italy cannot afford to h

This woman caused Dupiro the ragman, her servant's love,

I am aware of that.

You are aware of nothing. Poor old man.

"But our means are different."

"Let the patient reach a crisis," she said: "push him thr

A hollow laugh: "One way or another."

"Your way would leave them strength to prolong it. My emp

"Absolute upheaval," a nostalgic smile: "that is your way
room, almost creeping with amassed objects. The street an

"Shall I tell you where I have been since our last closed

"No. What need to tell me? No doubt I have passed and rep

"How pleasant to watch Nothing." Her face (so rarely had

"See my lovely shoes," as half an hour before he'd knelt
instead of bas-relief. How tiresome to have the same feet

Girl? She was nearly forty. But then - aside from a body

"I must go," he told her.

"My caretaker will drive you back." As if conjured, the m

In the automobile, racketing back toward Valletta, neither

"You must not hurt her, you know."

Stencil turned, struck by a thought.

"You are young Gadrulfi - Godolphin - aren't you?"

"We both have an interest in her," Godolphin said. "I am

"I too, in a way. She will not be hurt. She cannot be."

III

Events began to shape themselves for June and the coming

Stencil and Veronica Manganese met often. It was hardly a

his sentimental drunks with Demivolt; these plus Fairing

Veronica was kind. Her time with Stencil was entirely for

Carla did come to him again with unfaked tears this time,

"The priest is gone," she wept. "Whom else do I have? My

He was tempted to tell her. But was restrained by the fir
He found himself hoping that there was indeed adultery be

Herbert would be eighteen. And probably helling it all ab

His father, ha.

"Signora," hastily, "I have been selfish. Everything I ca

"We - my child and I: why should we continue to live?"

Why should any of us. He would send her husband back. Wit

Demivolt and he had it out the next evening.

"You're

not helping, you know. I can't keep this thing off by mys

"We've lost our contacts. We've lost more than that . . .

"What the hell is wrong, Sidney."

"Health, I suppose," Stencil lied.

"O God."

"The students are upset, I've heard. Rumor that the Unive

Demivolt took it as Stencil had hoped: a sick man's atten

On 4 June the acting Police Commissioner requested a 25-m

"We are for it," Demivolt announced that evening.

"I'm off for the Palace." Soon after Godolphin called for

Out at the villa, the drawing room was lit with an unaccu

Stencil smiled at Maijstral's confusion. "We are old frie

Outside his smile faded. "Now quickly, Maijstral, don't i

"The signora -" jerking his head back

toward the foyer - "still needs me. My wife has her child

"It is an order: from both of us. I can add this: if you

"It is a sin."

"Which she will risk." But Maijstral still shuffled.

"Very well: if I see you again, here or in my woman's com

Stencil made

a short prayer: let him be less and less sure as he gather

She smiled as he returned to the drawing room. "All done?

He collapsed into a Louis Quinze chair whose two seraphim

Tension grew through 6 June. Units of the civil police an

At 3:30 P.M. on 7 June mobs began to collect in Strada Re
buildings were set on fire. Two RAF lorries with machine

A minor eddy in the peaceful course of Maltese government

Early on the morning of 10 June 1919, Mehemet's xebec set

But as the xebec was passing Fort St. Elmo or thereabouts
driver with a mutilated face to come to the harbor's edge

Draw a line from Malta to Lampedusa. Call it a radius. So

THE END